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Forrest, Karen Anne

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POWER, INDEPENDENCE AND WORKER DEMOCRACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF METALWORKERS OF SOUTH AFRICA (NUMSA) AND ITS PREDECESSORS: 1980 – 1995

Karen Anne Forrest

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg, December 2005

Abstract

This thesis examines the building of power and how workers' control and union independence augmented or detracted from this process in the National Union of Metalworkers and its predecessors from the 1980s to the mid 1990s. These unions aimed to accrue power to improve both their members' working conditions and to effect political and economic transformation. In this process the building of non-racial national industrial unions that cut across the ethnically constituted state, the promotion of workers' control, and political independence from formal political organisations were central. This thesis demonstrates how Numsa and its predecessors overcame obstacles to the accrual of power and scrutinizes reasons for failures in achieving pivotal ideological goals.

In the early 1980s Numsa's predecessors constructed greater degrees of democratic organizational and bureaucratic power. The formation of Numsa in 1987 allowed for the further construction of an efficient bureaucracy to support organizational and bargaining activities. It successfully forged national bargaining forums and built hegemony across the industry. In 1993 Numsa adopted a programme through which it hoped to restructure its industries in the transitional period leading up to a new democracy. It failed however to successfully implement the programme in its entirety. Tensions emerged in union goals as membership remained focused on increased wages whilst leadership was attempting to restructure industry, enhance worker skills and augment workers' control in the workplace.

In the political sphere Numsa was largely unable to effect a deeper infusion of its socialist leanings. Though Numsa and other Cosatu unions made an important contribution to the birth of a non-racial democracy, the capitalist state succeeded in demobilizing the trade unions in their pursuit of more fundamental systemic change. By the time Numsa produced the concept of a Reconstruction Accord, later developed into the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the space to popularise a socialist perspective had been considerably reduced. Although Numsa forewent its early `party autonomous` position when Cosatu entered the ANC/SACP alliance, this was clearly far from a `state ancillary` stance. Though labour had won the right to be consulted in Nedlac and the right to strike, the possibility of dissent being diverted into bureaucratic chambers existed with a consequent loss of militant, strategic and ideological focus.

Key words: trade union power, workers control, trade union independence, National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), National Automobile & Allied Workers Union (Naawu), Metal & Allied Workers Union (Mawu), Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (Micwu), post 1980 metal unions, metal union politics, metal union bargaining, metal union organisation, trade union alliances, trade unions and violence

Declaration

This thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not previously been submitted to any other university or for any other degree

Karen Forrest

Date

DEDICATION

To my mother who would not have read this

Acknowledgements

This thesis exists owing to a request in 1996 from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa for me to write a popular version of the union's history. My research went much deeper than required and has resulted in a more in-depth account of Numsa's history which is chronicled in these pages. My gratitude goes to Numsa office bearers for setting me on a course of tracing a fascinating history of courageous and creative workers and officials who achieved an astounding amount in a short period of time. Numsa generously permitted me to use material that had originally been gathered in the course of writing the book for the union. Jenny Grice and Dinga Sikweba, both officials in Numsa at the time, were an invaluable support and have assisted extensively and promptly.

I would like to express my gratitude also to a number of academics. Sakhela Buhlungu originally suggested I embark on this thesis and gave me the confidence to do so. His assistance was critical in certain phases of writing this work. Glenn Adler was my co-supervisor before leaving for the USA and thereafter maintained an interest in the progress of the thesis and responded helpfully to various requests I made of him. My appreciation goes to Professor Phil Bonner who patiently guided me back into an academic mode of thought and writing after years outside of the field. His insights and suggestions deepened the content of the work and ensured that an unusually long thesis was structurally sound.

A number of people, on a voluntary basis, assisted with interviewing people across the country. Jenny Grice conducted many focus group interviews in different Numsa regions, Erna Senekal helped with interviews in the Eastern Cape, and Matthew Ginsberg and Tom Bramble kindly lent me interviews they had conducted during the course of their own research. Friends such as Jane Barrett and Steve Faulkner lent important support along the way and an early editorial group consisting of such people as Bobbie Mare and Karl von Holdt also gave invaluable advice.

My deepest thanks goes to past and present Numsa members and officials who gave freely of their time to participate in long interviews. I returned to a number of these people to conduct further interviews or with queries and was always willingly helped. Bernie Fanaroff especially should be mentioned in this regard. In interviews people shared their experiences, their struggles, their sufferings and their thoughts and analyses of the union's role in the periods they had participated in union work. Their observations were often both astute and inspirational, even when it was painful to revisit such memories. For many it was the first opportunity to return to these intense, exciting and fraught times and for most it was an important moment. I feel honoured to have been part of sharing such important memories. These were after all people who richly contributed to creating a

new democracy in South Africa and who assisted in forging critical worker rights and improved conditions and wages for thousands of racially oppressed and impoverished South Africans.

Finally much appreciation goes to my family who now forever have erased the word `thesis` from their vocabulary and the word `Numsa` has become a household vocabulary item. My children, Robert and Alex grew up before me as I laboured on and on in the process of writing and my father wondered whether he would be alive to see it come to fruition. Robert importantly helped me with my footnotes. My mother sadly died while it was in progress. My deep gratitude goes to Melvyn who most generously freed me, without complaint, from bringing in a household income in order to work on the thesis. He has given me support in numerous ways including with academic advice and in encouraging me when the going was hard. Most of my family have survived to see its completion and they surely know that the world (and workers) are richer for the existence of unions such as the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa.

Abstract

This thesis examines the building of power and how workers' control and union independence augmented or detracted from this process in the National Union of Metalworkers and its predecessors from the 1980s to the mid 1990s. These unions aimed to accrue power to improve both their members' working conditions and to effect political and economic transformation. In this process the building of non-racial national industrial unions that cut across the ethnically constituted state, the promotion of workers' control, and political independence from formal political organisations were central. This thesis demonstrates how Numsa and its predecessors overcame obstacles to the accrual of power and scrutinizes reasons for failures in achieving pivotal ideological goals.

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In the political sphere Numsa was largely unable to effect a deeper infusion of its socialist leanings. Though Numsa and other Cosatu unions made an important contribution to the birth of a non-racial democracy, the capitalist state succeeded in demobilizing the trade unions in their pursuit of more fundamental systemic change. By the time Numsa produced the concept of a Reconstruction Accord, later developed into the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the space to popularise a socialist perspective had been considerably reduced. Although Numsa forewent its early `party autonomous` position when Cosatu entered the ANC/SACP alliance, this was clearly far from a `state ancillary` stance. Though labour had won the right to be consulted in Nedlac and the right to strike, the possibility of dissent being diverted into bureaucratic chambers existed with a consequent loss of militant, strategic and ideological focus.

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Acronyms

AAC	Alexandra Action Committee
AAC	Anti-Apartheid Conference
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AMEO	Automobile Manufacturers Employers Organisation
ANC	African National Congress
AZACTU	Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions
BAC	Brits Action Committee
BC	Black Consciousness
BEC	Branch Executive Committee
BLA	Black Local Authority
CC	Central Committee
CCAWUSA	Commercial Catering & Allied Workers Union
CCOBTU	Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions
CIWW	Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand
CMBU	Confederation of Metal and Building Unions
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
CWI	Consolidated Wire Industries
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
EAWU	Engineering and Allied Workers Union
EEC	European Economic Community
EIWU	Engineering Industrial Workers
EPAMA	Eastern Province Auto Manufacturers Association
ERAB	East Rand Administration Board
ERAPO	East Rand People's Organisation
ESOPS	Employee Share Ownership Schemes
FAWU	Food & Allied Workers Union
FC	Freedom Charter
FCI	Federated Chamber of Industries
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FIOM	Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici
FOFATUSA	Federation of Free Trade Unions of South Africa
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GAWU	General & Allied Workers Union
GEC	General Electric Company
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund
GM	General Motors
GST	General Sales Tax
GWU	General Workers Union
HSL	Household Subsistence Level
IAC	Industrial Area Committee
IAS	Industrial Aid Society
ICA	Industrial Conciliation Act
ICEF	International Chemical and Energy Federation
ICEF	International Chemical and Energy Federation
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IETB	Industry Education and Training Board
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ILO	International Labour Organisation

IMF	International Metalworkers Federation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMS	Iron Moulders Society
IMSSA	Independent Mediation Services of South Africa
ISP	Industrial Strategy Project
ITB	Industry Training Board
JMC	Joint Management Centre
JWC	Joint Working Committee
KZP	KwaZulu Police
LCC	Local Campaigns Committee
LCC	Local Campaigns Committee
LIFO	Last in First Out
LRA	Labour Relations Act
LRAA	Labour Relations Amendment Act
LRAA	Labour Relations Amendment Act
LWC	Living Wage Campaign
MACWUSA	Motor Assemblers & Component Workers Union
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MBSA	Mercedez Benz South Africa
MDM	Movement for Democratic Change
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MIA	Motor Industry Authority
MICWU	Motor Industry Combined Workers Union
MIEU	Motor Industry Employees' Union of South Africa
MIGPF	Metal Industries Group Pension Fund
MIMAF	Metal Industries Medical Fund
MISA	Motor Industry Staff Association
MITG	Motor Industry Task Group
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NAAMSA	National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NBC	National Bargaining Conference
NBF	National Bargaining Forum
NCC	National Campaigns Co-ordinating Committee
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEDCOM	National Education Committee
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEF	National Economic Forum
NIC	National Industry Council
NICISEMI	National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry
NICMI	National Industry Council for the Motor Industry
NLC	National Liaison Committee
NMC	National Manpower Commission
NOCC	National Organising and Campaigns Committee
NP	National/Nationalist Party
NTB	National Training Board
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor Assembly & Rubber Workers of South Africa
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
NUWCC	National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee
NWWC	National Women Workers Committee
OCB	Organising and Collective Bargaining
ODT	Oukasie Development Trust
PAC	Pan African Congress

PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PDL	Poverty Datum Line
PE	Port Elizabeth
PEBCO	Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)
PWAWU	Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union
PWV	Pretoria/ Witwatersrand/Vaal
RCC	Regional Campaigns Committee
RCC	Regional Campaign Committee
RDG	Research & Development Group
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
REDCOM	Regional Education Committee
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
SABS	South African Boilermakers, Iron and Steelworkers, Shipbuilders and Welders Society
SACCAWU	South African Commercial Catering & Allied Workers Union
SACOS	South African Council of Sport
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADF	South African Defence Force
SALB	*South African Labour Bulletin*
SAMCOR	South African Motor Corporation
SAMIEA	South African Motor Industry Employers' Association
SAQA	South African Qualifications Act
SARHWU	South African Railway & Harbour Workers Union
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SAVBRA	South African Vehicle Builders' and Repairers Association
SDU	Self Defence Unit
SEAWUSA	Steel, Engineering & Allied Workers Union of South Africa
SEIFSA	Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa
SFAWU	Sweet Food & Allied Workers Union
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUACC	Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UAW	United Automobile, Rubber, and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
UDF	United Democratic Front
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UMMAWUSA	United Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of South Africa
USCO	Union Steel Corporation
UTP	Urban Training Project
UWUSA	United Workers Union of South Africa
VAT	Value Added Tax
VW	Volkswagen
WIP	Work in Progress
WPGWU	Western Province General Workers Union
WPMAWU	Western Province Motor Assemblers Workers Union
WPWAB	Western Province Workers Advice Bureau
YCW	Young Christian Workers

Chapter 1
Introduction

Part 1: Scope and theoretical formulation

1. Introduction

Labour, its supply, level of skill, its cost and its degree of organization have loomed large in the history of industrialized South Africa from the late 1800s onwards. In capital and the state's attempts to control the flow of labour to the urban areas of South Africa lay the seeds of apartheid ideology. By the time the National Party came to power in 1948 the foundations had been laid for an economic and political system which allowed for the flourishing of white capitalist accumulation on the basis of the exploitation of black labour. Over the years black labour made many attempts to organise itself and waged some impressive battles but it was only in the 1980s that the labour movement came to wield real power.

It is to this latter period that this thesis addresses itself. It seeks to explain the acquisition of power by a section of the labour movement which was constituted as a small independent formation in the early 1980s, but which was to flourish, reinstate the dignity of labour in fundamental ways, and at times dominate the political landscape. In this contestation of power to transform the apartheid workplace, and ultimately the apartheid state, certain unions emerged as potent forces for change and would pioneer organisational strategies and policies which would greatly strengthen trade union organisation. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) was one of these.

2. Scope & literature of period

Even examining a single union like Numsa is a vast project. Numsa affected thousands of workers' lives, organized and unorganized, huge numbers of people in adjacent black communities and numerous employers. It also spanned a range of pivotal manufacturing sectors. Thus in a limited study such as this, it is necessary to narrow the field. Perspective is one means of narrowing the scope and the angle that I have selected for this study is predicated on my personal history. I come from a trade union background and worked in the Transport & General Workers Union which fell under the same labour federations as Numsa and some of its predecessors. The struggle for human rights and democracy in South Africa was a project to which I was deeply committed. This thesis thus proceeds from a premise that historical research is coloured by the author's interests and value system. Indeed the study emanates from a request by Numsa office bearers in 1996 for me to write

a popular history of the union. It is thus not a history from the metal employers' perspective, nor that of the Nationalist government, and cannot claim to be a balanced account. A management history of the period is still to be written although, as this study will demonstrate, this is a history that white capital would probably prefer to bury, riddled as it is with human rights abuses. The thesis is thus a commentary and critique of the metal unions from within their perspective.

The period under review, and labour's contribution to it, has been extensively commented upon. These commentaries fall into general overviews of the period, or into a wide range of narrowly based descriptions and analyses of events, or trends, in a particular stage of development of the labour movement, or of specific trade unions. In the former category fall valuable reference books such as Friedman's *Building Tomorrow Today*, Baskin's *Striking Back*, McShane et al's *Power*, and Lowry's *20 Years in the Labour Movement*.[1] Such studies analyse general developments in the labour movement of the time and often focus on trade union federations, or co-ordinating groups, and not individual unions. In the latter category fall commentaries on particular strikes, organisational and bargaining strategies, political developments and responses, and the highlighting of emerging trends. It is in the nature of such disparate articles, in the *South African Labour Bulletin* for example, that gaps and uneven emphases on particular sectors or unions emerge. Numsa, for example, was divided into three industrial sectors, namely the engineering, auto and motor sectors. (This thesis will adhere to Numsa's categorisation throughout even if the auto sector is frequently referred to as the motor, or motor assembly sector in the literature.) The motor sector (which embraced workers in garages, vehicle repair shops, vehicle body builders, automotive engineers, manufacturers of car components, and workers in the car retail sector) has been largely neglected in the literature and the contribution of Micwu (Motor Industry Combined Workers Union) to Numsa's accretion of power has been hardly discussed. In addition a number of these studies were conducted fifteen or more years ago and so do not foresee the consequences for workers of Numsa's organisational and policy decisions. Bonin's study of BTR Sarmcol is a good example, as is Stewart's focus on the migrant worker in the foundries where a Numsa predecessor Mawu (Metal & Allied Workers Union) initially recruited.[2] These texts will be drawn upon, in some cases critically, in this study.

Nowhere in the academic literature can an integrated study of the developments within a singular South African manufacturing union over a sustained period be found. Some studies are available which examine particular workers' organising efforts such as Allen's three volumes on black mineworkers but these focus on miners' organisation between 1871 -1992 and are thus not a history of a particular union (although Volume Three does substantially focus on the National Union of Mineworkers).[3] Some popular trade union studies are available, including Sachs' personal account of the Garment Workers Union between 1928-1952[4] and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union and National Education Health & Allied Workers Union's popular photographic

histories but obviously reflect an insider bias.[5] An academic study of a particular union allows for the opening up of a rich and detailed area of analysis. It also offers the opportunity to gain holistic insight into constraints and unforeseen problems, the implementation and impact of particular policies and strategies and the contradictions that emerged, and an understanding of how the union furthered its agenda in both expected and unanticipated ways. By examining a union as a unit, it is also more possible to understand where the seat of innovation lay in the trade union movement more broadly.

The thesis traces the development of Numsa and its predecessors from the early 1980s through to 1995, a year after South Africa's first democratic elections. The choice of the 1980s as a point of departure may appear intellectually flawed as a number of Numsa's predecessors were formed in the 1970s. Indeed many of Numsa's pivotal strategies were formulated in this decade in its predecessors Numarwosa (National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa), and Mawu (Metal & Allied Workers Union) under the umbrella of the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Committee (Tuacc). In this period, for example, these unions made the important decision not to confront the state in a strategy of revolutionary rupture which was propounded by liberation forces at the time. Rather they chose incrementally to accrue power through an independent and disciplined approach which rested on strong factory structures based on practices of democratic accountability. One of the reasons for not starting the thesis in the 1970s however was that these years have been covered in the literature more comprehensively than the later period partly because of the emergent unions' limited scale of operation during this time. The *South Africa Labour Bulletin* for example covers all the key disputes and organisational developments, as do books such as Johann Maree's *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy - The Rebirth of African Trade Unions in South Africa in the 1970s* and Friedman's *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Union 1970 - 1984*.[6] It also became apparent that the scope of the thesis was extremely large. This was because of the scale and rapidity of change in the 1980s in the trade union movement and in the society more generally. Secondly a wide range of issues had to be explored under the themes of power, independence and workers' control.

In order to provide the necessary background to the 1980s the thesis devotes a section of Chapter One to an overview of the 1970s where it highlights the union's survival strategies and pivotal organisational approaches and innovations. It also explores the emergence of Numsa's most significant predecessors in the 1970s because their histories and traditions had an important influence on Numsa's future operations. The hybrid of traditions would contribute not only to its accumulation of power but also to its weaknesses.

Despite the rapidity of change and the complexity of issues in the 1980s, the thesis chooses to extend its scope to the mid nineties. Numsa, and indeed the union movement, achieved tremendous gains in the 1980s in both the workplace and in the society at large in alliance with popular political organisation. From 1989 it was poised to wield power in a significant manner for the country and the future of the trade union movement. To terminate the study at the end of the eighties would however be to discard the reason for which Numsa built power – to effect a fundamental change to apartheid and capitalist relations. It would also preclude an exploration of how Numsa chose to wield its influence in favour of working class power in a transitional phase to a new democracy. The transitional period ushered in many challenges for the powerful trade union movement where it now had to engage on a contested terrain fraught with complex questions and problems. By this time a greater sense of the limitations to its bold vision were becoming apparent not least from its own membership.

3. Research Methodology and Sources

A combination of different methods which complement each other was used in conducting research for this study. These included researching documentary sources, conducting both focus group and in-depth individual interviews, and accessing a variety of popular secondary sources. As previously stated the field that I have selected is large and can be approached from many different angles. It has thus been necessary to limit the range of sources that can be accessed. It is not a history from the metal employers' perspective, nor that of the Nationalist government and in the main does not draw on such sources. These include the archives and records of metal employers, employer associations, and state archives. The one key exception in this regard are the archives of the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi).

The study in all probability loses a dimension of interest in not interviewing employers (except in one case) but in other ways it has gained from my status as a participant in the labour movement. It is also not a history of the national and international labour federations to which these unions were affiliated, although some of these archives have on occasions been accessed when they elucidate Numsa's operations and policies. This historical overview of 15 years of metal organization merely represents the beginnings of a vast area of research. In this regard I would like to mention that some material that was originally included in the thesis has been omitted owing to the extended length of the work. In particular I would like to mention a section on these unions' use of legal strategies and an exploration of Mawu's first national company strike at Dunlop which Ari Sitas documented so admirably.[7] This is a fully written up and could be made available to anyone who has an interest in this area.

The study relies extensively on recorded oral interviews which Thompson contends `provide a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past`[8]. According to Bonin, "Oral history sees each

ordinary person's life history as having the potential to make a unique contribution towards the construction of history from below."[9] In the case of Numsa, human agency was critical in altering power relations and thus such detailed accounts are an appropriate technique. All interviews were conducted by people with a trade union history, the majority being undertaken by myself. A union background had the advantage of creating credibility with interview subjects and people were willing openly to share their experiences, including some intimate and fraught moments. Indeed for many it was the first time that they had shared these life-changing and formative experiences and it was clearly important for most of them to have the opportunity to do so. Many of the interviews too occurred simultaneously to investigations and sittings of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and thus ideas around revealing the past as a way of healing and moving forward was much in currency. Similarity in union background and the resultant trust was important in the South African context where interviewers were white and did not share a black language. Interviews were conducted in English which most black unionists spoke excellently, except in one case where the interviewee requested translation. The element of trust also permitted a high degree of honesty from interviewees as there was consensus that criticism came from within an understood framework. My closeness to the material under analysis obviously worked to my advantage but it also held dangers. It required me to be heedful of my trade union background and be self reflective in the analytic treatment of the research. I do not however believe that closeness to the subject of research precludes a critical analysis.

A further strength in conducting oral histories was the closeness of the material in historical time to the participants' involvement. Lambert observes that memory is continuously being reinterpreted and reformed by subsequent experience `giving rise to the problem of a retrospective bias`[10] and also that over time detail is inevitably forgotten. In this study interviews followed the period under review fairly (1980s), or very, soon after (1990s) when memory was still fresh. Also, more practically, the immediacy in time of the interviews to past events had the advantage of capturing the memories of participants who have since died.[11] Von Holdt comments of his study that, "The possibility of recovering the atmosphere and practices of the 1980s becomes more difficult as the intervening events dilute, filter and influence memory."[12] This is clearly a danger. As one interviewee observed, `Hindsight assumes normality`[13]. Thus it was important to be vigilant of the overlay of present-day interpretations and, where possible, to uncover past passions and responses beneath the current measured reflections. Lambert however views the process of remembering differently. In his work on Sactu he believes interview subjects' current engagement with transforming society allowed for a more complex construction of past events. It permitted a celebration of heroic achievements, but also allowed for a reflection on organizational constraints, problems and defeats some of which informed their present engagement.[14] A similar dynamic appeared to be at play in this study. Many of those interviewed were involved in transformative activity in the society some from within Numsa, others outside. An honesty around past problems,

defeats, and mistakes was often present. Furthermore people's vibrancy and clarity of recall was aided by the intensity with which they had engaged with strikes, debates, and strategies in the past.

The oral interviews conducted varied in nature and functioned differently. Seven focus group discussions were conducted in a range of Numsa regions, namely the Highveld, Wits East, Wits Central, Northern Transvaal, Vaal, Eastern Cape, and Western Cape regions. Participants' profiles were random as any members, or past members, of the various metal unions were invited to share their experiences. Thus different kinds of union participants interacted including organizers, shopstewards, and national and regional office bearers who had participated in the unions at various times. Some had participated in both a predecessor of Numsa's and in Numsa itself. The `interviews` were conducted by means of open-ended questions and free discussion and comment. On average 8 – 10 people participated in each focus group. Although such interviews precluded the in-depth quality of individual interviews, they served to map out the terrain and to highlight regional peculiarities.

Individual interviews were in the main more focused in their approach. Owing to the wide scope of Numsa's activities and sectors, and because this account embraces the histories of several unions which merged to form Numsa, a large number of interviews were conducted, sixty-two in all, of whom nine participants were interviewed twice. Interviews lasted between one and a half to two and half hours. In addition three telephone interviews and two e-mail interviews were conducted on very specific areas of interest. A further four interviews were also passed on to me for use by researchers working on other studies.[15] Interviews were supplemented by informal discussions and telephone conversations. Interviews were conducted with former and current metal trade unionists (chiefly former) who were central to the activities and policies of these unions in the period under review. In the initial stages of the study a few interviews were conducted with the aim of providing an overview of the events, shifts and trends in different periods of these unions' existence, but even these were located within specific sectors of the metal industry. Thereafter interviews were of a more narrow focused nature. Interviewees were selected for their knowledge of a particular event, strategy or experience in a period of the unions' histories and were again mainly situated within a particular organizing sector, either auto, metal/engineering or motor. Different sectors of the union were often located in different regions of South Africa and as a result those interviewed also represented a wide regional spread. Obviously however where a region dominated in the union, such as the PWV (Pretoria/ Witwatersrand/Vaal) more interviews were conducted with participants from this area. The interviewees represented the experiences of national union leadership, shopstewards and organizers, and some had played more than one of these roles. In this manner a range of different perspectives on union experience was obtained including national, regional and local ones. Those interviewed and their trade union profiles are recorded in the Appendix.

According to Bonin the oral interview approach to research has both advantages and disadvantages. It contributes to quality, a richness of detail and `empowers the subject to give their meaning to experiences` and allows `the masses to shape academic writing`[16]. Its disadvantages are however that it is impossible to conduct in-depth interviews with large numbers of people especially when analysing the impact of a huge institution such as a trade union. Interview subjects' memories are also at times factually faulty, sequences of events are confused, and the progress and outcomes of events and policies may be distorted or reflect a particular bias. It is therefore necessary to consult documentary sources, where available, which could serve as a corrective and control. The main primary sources utilized for this study were trade union policy documents, speeches, congress resolutions, reports, pamphlets, videos, booklets and newspapers. Primary sources were chiefly accessed at the University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers which houses the Mawu, Numsa, Fosatu, Cosatu, Taffy Adler (on Naawu), and Gavin Hartford (on Numsa's auto sector) collections. Some material was garnered from Numsa itself but it had recently deposited most of its pre-1994 material into the University of the Witwatersrand collection. Certain primary sources also resided in my personal possession in part donated to me by the *South African Labour Bulletin* when it terminated its trade union archive, and otherwise accumulated over years of involvement and personal interest in the trade union movement. Although the scope of this thesis involves the operations of four industrial councils, I decided to research Numsa's relationship with only one of these extensively. This was a decision made in order to limit the scope of the thesis which already threatened to become overly long, and because the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi) as a national body covered overwhelmingly the largest number of metal workers in the country. In the case of the other three Industrial Councils, Numsa's predecessors had bargained in these institutions for years prior to their merger into Numsa. The Nicisemi on the other hand became the centre of major debates, strategic interventions and industrial action in Mawu and Numsa, both whilst they were party to the Council and, in Mawu's case, as an outsider. A further reason for selecting the Nicisemi was that the auto regional Council was replaced by a National Bargaining Forum in the early 1990s, whereas the Nicisemi spanned the entire period under review and is thus a useful instrument in charting bargaining developments in the metal/engineering sector. Research was thus conducted in the offices of the Metal Engineering Industry Bargaining Council (MEIBC) where minutes of Nicisemi negotiations reside.

Finally the thesis has made use of a number of important studies in one or other of Numsa and its predecessors' sectors. In a study of this kind it was not possible to investigate every major dispute in these unions' histories. Where secondary material has been used however the thesis has brought fresh perspectives, and in some cases new information, to these interpretations. Certain popular journals, such as the *South African Labour Bulletin* and *Work in Progress* have also been a useful

source of information. They document debates, strategies, policies and disputes both in Numsa and in the union movement as a whole and were continuously published in the period under review.

4. Theoretical underpinning: trade unions and power

Taking into account the wide body of literature that exists on trade unions in the 1980s and 1990s this study comes with a fresh approach to Numsa's history and poses new questions, and uses larger and different categories of analysis. By focussing on the combined themes of power, independence, and worker`s control and democracy, the study hopes to interrogate how these unions accrued power in the 1980s and were able to make a significant contribution to change in South Africa. It also explores how in the 1990s constraints on its power became apparent.
Ross describes trade unions as "institutions which are thought of as wielding great power – or, at least, significant repositories of power."[17] Yet the notion of `power` is complex. It has been discussed in many different contexts and analysed in a number of different ways. Bacharach et al, for example, comment that**,** "The concept of power remains elusive despite the recent prolific outpourings of case studies on community power."[18] The concept does not lend itself to neat definitions and in the South African trade union arena, as Macun observes, it has lacked variety and complexity and it is most often resolved in the idea of power being oppositional in the sense that one group subsumes the other.[19] It should be noted that power has frequently been discussed in the literature in a negative connotation through such concepts as domination and exploitation[20] whereas in this study it is more frequently employed to consider its productive and emancipatory qualities. This section will not exhaustively dissect the many different notions and theoretical discussions that surround the concept of power but will focus rather on some useful tools which allow for the analysis of the construction of power in relation to trade unions as major organs of working class power. The concepts outlined are not rigid analytic models. They do however serve to contextualise some of the organisational tactics and strategies adopted, the popularity or ambivalence towards such strategies, emphases and allegiances, and the debates and contestation that emerged on the route to building power. The discussion that follows reviews writings on power that stretch back to the early 1900s and embrace both metropolitan and South African contributions. It includes conservative, liberal and Marxist notions of power. It will become apparent that power in this thesis is the primary theme and that the concepts of workers' control and union independence are examined in relation to how they detract from, or augment an accumulation or loss of power.

Writing in 1959, Michels analyses the accrual of power in socialist democratic organisations such as political parties and trade unions and reaches a pessimistic and conservative conclusion. He is of the opinion that despite an early emphasis on participatory democracy in trade unions, their structure ultimately resolves itself into an oligarchy. A growing complexity in organisational structure, including the development of an administrative bureaucracy, results in a division of

labour as professional leaders enter the union. With the emergence of a skilled hierarchy, the rank and file lose control of their organisation. A gap widens in their mutual interests.

> The interest of the body of [union] employees are always conservative, and in a given political situation their interests may dictate a defensive and even reactionary policy when the interests of the working class demand a bold and aggressive policy. By a universally applicable social law, every organ of the collectivity, brought into existence through the need for a division of labour, creates for itself, as soon as it becomes consolidated, interests peculiar to itself.
>
> The principle is that one dominant class inevitably succeeds another... History is the record of a continued series of class struggles and the doctrine that class struggles invariably culminate in the creation of new oligarchies which undergo fusion with the old. Thus historical evolution merely represents an uninterrupted series of oppositions ...attaining one after another to power, and passing from the sphere of envy to the sphere of avarice…socialism would perish in the moment its adherents triumph.[21]

Lester[22], writing in 1958 advances a similar theory to Michels around the location and exertion of power in trade unions making particular reference to the development of unions in the USA. According to Lester trade unions pass through stages. Initially rank and file participation is high as the union fights for its existence. Later as it wins rights and establishes bargaining institutions a goal displacement occurs. The organization becomes more complex and an enlarged bureaucracy emerges together with a specialization of tasks. Skilled national leadership grow in power in the organization and become progressively distanced from rank and file. Eventually it comes to identify more closely with the goals of management than of membership. Membership on its part becomes dependent on union professionals to conduct progressively more complex bargaining. Institutionalized collective bargaining constrains grassroots participation through the introduction of procedures in order to stave off spontaneous industrial action. The locus of power shifts away from grassroots membership as militancy and strike action declines. Power and influence are wielded in a less conflictual manner and internal democracy is reduced.

Crouch falls into a similar pluralist tradition although he is writing in the early 1980s. He provides a rich and varied review of collective action in the British trade union movement in the 1970s and early 1980s. He locates the source of trade union power in the ability to take action, particularly strike action. He also analyses the limitations of strike action and labour's weakness in relation to capital. He addresses a variety of issues that affect on the success of a strike such as timing, the state of the product market, the existence of strike funds, the rate of unemployment, the nature of replacement labour, violence, and picketing laws. He also examines the institutionalisation of conflict where agreement is reached on limiting the scope of conflict to manageable issues including establishing dispute resolution mechanisms. In the management of conflict Crouch sees a divide between the national union centre and grassroots membership. Members may accept national participation if it is producing direct gains but a strong shop floor movement may also rupture national level understandings with government or employers to deliver industrial peace if it

cannot see benefits. Thus a contradiction in union goals manifests itself. Important dialogue in national forums may not be supported by the base and thus national power may result in few major social changes. Members may resist agreements for wage restraint in exchange for other guarantees and rights or long-term rise in income. The national centre acts as the guarantor of member's long-term interests. Yet the power of the labour movement may lie in its decentralised mass participative character. The shopfloor is essential for protecting workers at the plant level and without such activity a decline in workplace conditions would result. This paradox Crouch views as the contemporary tragedy of the labour movement.[23]

Simkins fuses Max Weber and Hannah Arendt's (writing in the 1920s and 1960s respectively) conceptions to engage with a liberal notion of power. The `realist` view of power sees either an individual or a group within a social relationship imposing its will on others regardless of resistance to the acquisition of this power. The `communicative action` concept asserts that power is invested in a group as long as it coheres. Individuals are only empowered as long as they act in the name of the group to which they belong. The two notions differ radically in their relationship to violence. The `realists` view coercion, manipulation and violence as the means by which they can impose their will on others. The communicative action group views its power ending where manipulation and violence begin as such approaches destroy the possibility of acting in unison and acting in the name of the common will. It stresses the importance of the creation of a democratic culture. Communicative action power is legitimated by consent and implies the possibility of a process of development. Simkins asserts that, "People capable of a detailed understanding of their situation or of advanced moral capabilities can register and act on issues inaccessible to a less evolved community."[24] Power is based on laws, rules, procedures, and institutions which evolve through consent.

Simkins' conception of power, by his own admission, is limited as an analytic tool. It is overly idealistic, simplistic and definitive in its formulation. It does not cater for the analysis of an organisation's internal practices and how it interacts with outside constituencies which could fall within both notions of power. It also does not acknowledge historical reasons for the dominance of realist power within, for example, a resistance organisation which is forced to adopt violence as a strategy. [25] Nevertheless it provides a broad model from which to locate different kinds of institutions and structures. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, when Numsa and its predecessors were organising, the state was characterised by a realist notion of power. As its legitimacy was challenged so it employed greater degrees of force. The metal unions on the other hand, experiencing the violence of the apartheid state, eschewed such coercion and their operations fell into the communicative action model. They were in the main independent organisations which developed strong factory-based shopsteward structures resting on democratic accountability. Their philosophy of workers' control depended on formal structures, representation and procedures but

also lay in the promotion of a culture of democratic consultation. Their consensual manner of operating allowed for negotiation and the formation of alliances as a means of furthering their power and interests. Their democratic beliefs entailed a focus on the restructuring of the state, and the economy in particular. They envisaged a consociation democracy in a unitary state where the working class would have an important input on the redistribution of wealth.

Bachrach and Baratz develop a more complex view of power where they contend that, "To measure relative influence solely in terms of the ability to initiate and veto proposals is to ignore the possible exercise of influence or power in limiting the scope of initiation" [26] These are matters that never reach the table because the individual anticipates that the opposition to them would be too strenuous. Thus potentially dangerous issues are never aired. Lukes[27] however criticises Weber, and the later contributors to the power debate Bachrach and Baratz [28], for adopting an individualist view of power. They operate within the paradigm of power emanating from individuals who realise their wills despite the resistance of others. Lukes contends that wielding power is more complex. Organisations consist of individuals but their power cannot be analysed in terms of individual decisions and motivations alone. The power to control agendas, and ensure the exclusion of potential issues, can only be analysed in the context of collective forces, and social and institutional arrangements and practices. He also argues that it is inadequate to associate power with observable conflict alone. He asks, "Indeed is not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have desires you want them to have - that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires… Leaders also shape preference..... the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place…Is not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people… from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things…"[29]

Lukes' conception of power being located in social arrangements is important and provides a point of departure for many later radical commentaries. Wright in his analysis of core concepts in Neo Marxist theories of power asserts that socialists aim to extend and deepen democratic authority through equality of political participation but also through new forms of democratic engagement which capitalism thwarts. According to Wright degrees of democracy in any society or institution can be evaluated by the extent to which political power is distributed and the range of decisions the democratic process embraces. This also involves the extension of democratic governance over the economy.[30]

Drawing on Lukes and other theorists he dissects the notion of power through defining different levels.[31] Situational power refers to power relations of direct command and obedience even in the face of resistance. Wright views such power play as constituting liberal versus conservative

politics where individuals conflict over moves in a game where there are established rules and procedures. Institutional power refers to the ability to define what one wants, to get it on the public table, and to thus shape deliberations according to these needs. This is the power to effect rules, regulations, and protocols which preclude other interests from getting aired. Systemic power refers to the power to shape what people want. According to Wright, "Reformist versus reactionary politics are conflicts at institutional levels of power over attempts to transform the rules within which situational conflicts occur."[32] The formation of wants however is tied to the nature of the social system and is thus linked to the power to effect systemic change. Contestation at the systemic level represents revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary politics and are conflicts over which game to play. The stakes are thus much higher when the nature of the game is contested rather than the rules within a game alone. Wright comments that, "This does not imply that a change in the "game itself" cannot be accomplished by gradual incremental changes in the rules of the game. It is possible that reformist struggles cumulatively could have revolutionary consequences."[33] Neo Marxist theories of the state contend that at each of these levels of power, capitalism undermines democractic participation in order to shore up its own interests.[34]

Macun utilises some of Wright's tools for analyzing power and applies them to how they can be used to evaluate the acquisition of power in trade unions. He sees organizational power as being the mechanism through which the working class acts in pursuit of particular interests and objectives. He gives examples of political parties and trade unions as being such mechanisms. Organisational power in the case of trade unions is determined by such factors as the level of unionisation, the degree of unity and cohesion within the union structure, their representational and administrative capacity and the degree of co-operation with political parties. Macun sees in respect to institutional power, the power to shape what is put on the agenda and to shape rules and regulations, this being embodied in industrial relations legislation, collective bargaining arrangements, and the union's power to shape and create these institutions. Macun also contributes an additional locus of power which he terms working class power. Such power refers to the relations between classes and within a class. The power to realise working class interests can be affected by a range of systemic features such as racial cleavages, the rate of unemployment, migrant and immigrants in the workforce and the existence and nature of industrial relations legislation. Such factors affect working class unity, and the ability to forge common interests and alliances and to pursue a working class agenda in relation to other classes.[35]

Tarrow's analysis of what constitutes contentious politics and where its power lies, falls within the framework of the above notions of power and chiefly concerns institutional and systemic levels of power. He maintains that people engage in contentious politics when political opportunities broaden and constraints change. By employing strategic collective action in such circumstances participants reveal opponents' vulnerability and create cleavages in the society which open up

further possibilities for action. Such action if based on cultural and `dense social networks and connective structures`, [36]can result in powerful interactions with opponents. Over time the potential for the formation of alliances is created and more timid actors are drawn into widening cycles of contention. Institutions, he asserts, are effective settings for social movements to germinate. Such movements constitute a national struggle for power and have historically been `central to political and social change.`[37] He concludes that, "At the extreme end of the spectrum, cycles of contention give rise to revolutions … unhinging old institutions and the networks that surround them, and creating new ones out of the forms of collective action with which insurgent groups begin the process"[38] Thus opportunities which are seized and nurtured at the institutional level can burgeon into movements which make claims on systemic power.

The contributions of these more radical commentators provide a paradigm in which the construction of these metalworker unions' power can be analysed. Although individual contributions operating within understood parameters of rules and regulations contribute to a build up (or diminution) of these unions' power, it was the building of organisational, institutional, working class, and ultimately systemic levels of power that are central to their history. Their accrual of power, in Lukes' model, should be mainly analysed in the context of collective forces, and social and institutional arrangements and practices and not in terms of overt conflict alone. These unions aimed to deepen and extend democracy (excluding Micwu), including democratic governance over the economy, and hence the power and influence of workers as a class. Unions provided the institutional structure from which such a social movement could be launched. They were concerned to build institutional power but the ultimate goal was to employ such power to effect incremental, and radical change. This they would have to achieve through an awareness of the obstacles to working class power, such as ethnic and racial cleavage. The extent of their awareness and their ability to act on such knowledge would influence degrees of working class power. Commentators such as Michels, Lester, and Crouch have less to offer in the provision of a model from which to analyse these metal unions' construction of power. Nevertheless they make a number of important observations and Crouch's dissection of trade union collective action is rich and provides useful analyses. They are however rooted in a European and North American tradition where the societies they analyse are not engaged in waging struggles against super exploitation or repressive regimes, nor are they on the cusp of political change. Crouch, for example, is writing from the depths of Thatcherite Britain where political change appeared remote and working class politics was on the decline. His crude characterisation of `certain` Marxists (he provides no other models) advocating that workers` long-term interests lie in the destruction of business as only through the collapse of capitalism can workers bring about a new mode of production, even if this in the short term entails job loss, does not provide a useful analytic model.[39] Crouch dismisses Marxist alternatives and does not approach political unionism from the point of view of deepening and extending democracy which these unions aimed to do. He views

the divide between the membership and the national union centre as a tragedy of the labour movement and cannot envisage a healthy and strategic tension operating between the two. These commentators' view of trade union potential to democratise society or to remain internally democratic is essentially pessimistic. In contrast, the 1980s and early 1990s were years of violent but heady optimism in South Africa and organisations were mobilising around the possibilities for radical democratic change.

In assessing models of power it is important to consider two influences on Mawu and Numsa. The manner in which trade unions view their goals impacts on the nature and form of power they wish to construct. Numsa's aim was expressly political, and although the means and final goal were contested, models of worker power to influence both economic and political outcomes were important. A number of people interviewed[40] testified to the influence of the writings of Antonio Gramsci and to the South African theorist Rick Turner's ideas and writings.[41]

Hyman traces Marxist's positions on the revolutionary potential of trade union activity. Marx and Engel's viewed trade union achievements in economic transformative terms as limited especially as economic laws tended towards the further immiseration of workers. Nevertheless they considered unions' political potential as significant.[42] Following the deaths of Marx and Engels however socialist writings of the twentieth century tended to focus on union activities as impeding the transformation of capitalist relations. Lenin in *What is to be Done* argued that union activity posed no threat to the capitalism system. Workers were only capable of developing a `trade union consciousness`: "the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation."[43] According to Lenin, "There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology…; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade unionism…and trade-unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie."[44] Revolutionary consciousness would have to be brought to workers from outside for them to be liberated from bourgeois ideological enslavement. Lenin's view remained influential and it became routine for socialists to view trade unions as displaying `a natural tendency to integration within the system`.[45] Gramsci, like Marx and Lenin, viewed conflict and the emergence of social movements as embedded in the structure of society and like Lenin, he viewed Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. His writings were directed at changing the world and he advanced the idea that men made their own destinies within an historical context. Changes to improve the lot of mankind, he believed, could be wrought through ideas and he thus focussed on the role that an advanced intellectual elite could play.[46] Gramsci believed that proletarian power would only emanate from the activity of the working class in dialogue with this class conscious vanguard. He did not consider it necessary to wait for 'the fullness of time' to realise a revolution. Unlike many socialists of his time he developed ideas for a constructive

programme to bring change.[47] Concrete problems could only be solved in practice, "The dictatorship of the proletariat should stop being a mere phrase - the means of attaining it should be actively implemented."[48] The opinion and participation of the rank and file, which critically included trade unions, was eagerly solicited. In this he was closer to Marx and Engels' view, rather than Lenin's, believing that

trade union activity held significant political potential.

It was however to Lenin's writings on worker Soviets that Gramsci turned to for inspiration in the development of an active programme. His application of Lenin's ideas to the Italian situation in Turin was highly original. He investigated whether any working class institution existed in Italy which compared with the Soviets in Russia and came to the conclusion that existing trade union structures were too bureaucratised. He came to focus on the internal commissions (commissione interna) or factory grievance committees which consisted of a small number of workers who dealt with every day problems of discipline and arbitration in Turin metal/engineering factories.[49] In the last year of the First World War the commissions evolved into genuine centres of autonomous shop-floor activity often in opposition to established union leadership. [50] In April 1918 employers entered an agreement, to be extended to all metallurgical works in Turin, with the metal union FIOM (Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici) which permitted workers to elect internal commissions to negotiate pay disputes. Proffering his ideas in a publication he jointly established, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci promoted the concept that internal commissions were an embryonic form of worker democracy which had the potential to develop into organs of workers' power. Socialists, he advocated, should work directly in `the centres of proletarian life` in internal commissions, the Socialist Clubs, and peasant communities.[51] The aim was to free the commissions, or as they became known factory councils, from employer restrictions and reinvigorate them. According to Gramsci, "Developed and enriched, tomorrow they will become the organs of the proletarian power which replaces capitalism in all its useful functions of administration and leadership..." [52]

Gramsci believed that the factory councils would permit workers to think for themselves as an homogenous group and would assist in the development of political and administrative leadership. Factory Councils would elect leaders and educate less advanced comrades "causing a radical transformation in working class psychology, making the working class better prepared to exercise power, and, through spontaneously generated common historical experience, spreading an awareness of the rights and duties of comrades and workers."[53] The councils would adopt a different role from that of unions bargaining for higher wages and would ultimately take over the running of factories. They held the potential "of preparing men, organism and concepts through continuous pre-revolutionary work of control, to ready them to replace the bosses' authority in the

workplace, and to place social life within a new framework".[54] Class consciousness would develop through the councils and Gramsci hoped communists would ultimately lead them. The councils would have both a political and technical educative role in the factory as Gramsci advocated the preparation of the proletariat for their hegemonic role over workers of other classes. In his view class domination was exercised through popular consensus as much as it was through the threat of, or actual implementation of, physical coercion. Gramsci's notion of `ideological hegemony` marked a significant extension of classical Marxist, including Lenin's, analysis of power. For classical Marxists, ruling class domination rested on force and coercion. Gramsci for his part, believed that these Marxists failed to see the pervasive forms of ideological control that perpetuated the ruling elite's power. Such hegemony permeated civil society and defined its entire system of values including in trade unions, schools, churches, and the family. Hegemony fulfilled a role that naked force could never perform. It induced the oppressed to consent to its own exploitation. The role of education, media, and culture was critical in this exercise. Thus the task of creating a counter-hegemonic world view, or `an integrated culture`[55] was essential in any struggle for liberation. Systemic change could only be effected by a crisis of ideological hegemony and changing consciousness was thus an inseparable part of revolutionary transformation. Gramsci propounded the notion of an `ensemble of relations` which included politics, economics, culture, social relations and the whole realm of ideology. The struggle to change one element of society was linked to the struggle to transform all other parts. The assumption behind Gramsci's view of hegemony was that the working class, before it seized state power, must establish its right to rule as a class through a superiority in economic, technical, political, ethical and cultural matters.[56] Hegemony was a matter of the degree of equilibrium between state and civil society and any crisis in the established order which would create space for revolutionary transformation must of necessity entail a crisis of ideological hegemony in civil society. Thus the main political thrust of a socialist movement would be to create a `counter-hegemony` to break the ideological link between the ruling class and the general population. This new `integrated culture` would not suddenly emerge but would advance in stages of struggle. To repeat Gramsci's conclusion, "If the ruling class has lost its consensus ie is no longer `leading` but only`dominant`, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies...The crisis exists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears."[57] The working class, he contended, only came into being when it became conscious of its existence as a class and could then play a role in history through the development of a comprehensive and integrated world view and a political programme.[58]

Gramsci advocated the broadening of the narrow factory role of councils through their interaction with Socialist Clubs which would become centres for councils in each area, and be composed of elected delegates from all industries in the area. Such area committees of workers would become

an `emanation of the whole working class`[59]and would maintain discipline and co-ordinate stoppages in all workplaces in an area. In turn, area committees would form the basis of city-wide structures which would fall under the PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano) and trade union federations. Such a system of accountable workers' democracy would operate as a conscientising and educative force. The factory council movement would reach its pinnacle in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thereafter the role of trade unions would shift to assist in the socialisation of industry.[60]

Such ideas had great impact on Turin workers when *L'Ordine Nuovo* published an article on 21 June 1919 entitled "Worker Democracy". "For us and our followers, *L'Ordine Nuovo* became the paper of the factory councils" commented Gramsci.[61] The council movement was concentrated in metal/engineering plants and in October 1919 the automobile and metalworkers commissars elected a *Study Committee for Factory Councils*. It produced a document, *The Programme of the Workshop Commissars*, which was adopted by the general factory assembly of the factory commissars of Turin. It was both a programme and an elucidation of the concepts behind the rise of working class power. It included a consideration of such issues as the importance of the democratic mandate, and that elected commissars were only executers of the people's will. The role of commissars was also discussed. They were responsible for the economic defence of workers and for collective action, and were required to assist in resolving disputes, gathering information on capital invested in a workshop and any other costs, and developing ideas on how to increase production guided by suggestions from workers. The commissar was also responsible for studying and evaluating workplace innovations suggested by management and ensuring thorough training of workers in a wide range of skills in order to control such innovations.[62]

As strikes escalated (in 1919 strikes totalled 1 663), factory councils rapidly spread across Turin. At Fiat Brevetti 2000 workers elected 32 commissars representing 11 sections of the works and the factory council was born. Factory councils spread from Fiat to Lancia and within a month each of Fiat's 42 divisions had formed a council.[63] Commented Gramsci, "..our projects almost always had an immediate and broad success and appeared as the interpretation of a widely felt need, never as the cold application of an intellectual scheme."[64] He noted the rise in militancy and worker discipline which enabled councils to coordinate stoppages of 16 000 workers within five minutes. Worker consciousness of socialist alternatives grew, the desire to follow the Russian Soviet example became stronger and many joined the PSI. In 1919 the PSI won 11 of 18 seats in the Turin municipal elections. Two weeks after the elections the PSI called for spontaneous demonstrations against a rising fascist threat and "An hour later this proletarian army fell like a landslide on the centre of the city, sweeping the nationalist and militarist rabble off the streets before it.'[65] Employers were alarmed and prepared a counter attack. On March 29, 1920 Fiat locked out its entire workforce and a general lockout of 30 000 workers in Turin ensued. Employers called in the troops. In the battle that followed workers were defeated and a weak PSI did little to mobilise

support elsewhere in Italy.[66] In consequence Gramsci advocated the replacement of the PSI with a different form of party. In this he differed from the Leninist conception of the vanguard party which, with its heightened consciousness, could lead workers to a sustainable revolution. His conception was of a worker's party which was controlled from the bottom. Its role was circumscribed to the seizure of political power and would co-ordinate revolutionary mobilisation at a national level. Such a revolution would evolve into progressive incursions into the heart of capital and would not be wrought by striking a single decisive blow at the capitalist system. The party was a vehicle for the political expression of working people and it was in the factories, through factory councils, that a revolutionary change in economic and political relations would be forged. [67]

Gramsci's early ideas on mobilising power for the working class had resonance for Numsa and its predecessors and similarities in approach are striking even down to the use of terminology to describe structures. Like Gramsci's these unions' politics was pragmatic in nature, their socialism was not only a rhetorical position. Numsa's base of power was the workplace and its leadership understood the need to thoroughly organise in this sphere. As in Gramsci's thinking, an intellectual elite held a responsibility for guiding and initiating new organisation. In a similar manner too to Gramsci this elite rejected the bureaucratic union leadership of old and developed a new set of powerful concepts. The prominence given to a democratic factory base prevented these unions from disappearing into the realm of theoretical positions. Mawu and Naawu worked hard at developing trained factory leadership, or shopstewards, and strong factory structures to assume responsibility for the building of factory power. Democratic mandated positions underpinned the shopstewards role and they existed only as representatives of the mass of workers. Numsa's predecessors recognised too the need to extend their power beyond the factory in layered accountable structures from local and area committees to the national level. As with Gramsci these metal unions laid a strong emphasis on education in order to develop an advanced layer of working class leadership who in turn would educate less developed workers on the factory floor. There were of course structural differences between the South African and Italian situations, such as Gramsci's separation of trade union and factory council functions, but Mawu and Naawu shopstewards and shopsteward committees performed many similar roles to factory commissars and factory councils.

More fundamental differences were apparent though in their approach to politics. The Numsa unions appreciated the importance and power of rank and file engagement and also the need to build national power. Yet they did not utilise or create a socialist party through which to develop worker political cadres or to co-ordinate workers' mobilisation of power at a national political level. Instead, and it should be stressed that this was by no means the only strand of political thinking in these unions, a predominant view, especially in the early days, was a form of

syndicalist politics. This strand was powerful in Mawu's political thinking and was to remain a strong tendency in Numsa. The `workerist` or as it became known later `syndicalist` tendency reflected a Gramscian conception of constructing workers' power but it was also influenced by Turner's ideas.

Turner viewed the workplace as the most vital area of an individual's life. Thus the first pillar of democracy was that workers should control the workplace. Trade unions, he asserted, were a limited weapon in the attainment of such control. To ensure that decisions were democratically and efficiently implemented two new institutions would need to be created. The first would be regular meetings of all workers to discuss such issues as wages, hours of work, and how to distribute profits. This would include discussion around whether profits should be reinvested or spent for collective purposes either in the workplace or in the broader community. The second institution would be an elected workers' council whose members would be full-time workers. The council would make decisions on regulations governing labour relations, hiring and firing policy, the production of financial statements and budgets and the allocation of areas of responsibility. A rotation of personnel would be implemented to prevent a bureaucratic hierarchy emerging. The enterprise would be divided into work units within which workers in each section would have a high degree of autonomy.[68]

Like Gramsci, Turner acknowledged that workers would not acquire the competence to run an enterprise immediately as capitalism had denied them the opportunity to participate in workplace decisions. He believed however that participation in decision-making would develop the ability to participate, raise the worker's level of competence, release creative initiative, and ultimately increase productivity levels. Turner also discusses the nature of democratic political institutions that should govern the society. Collective enterprises, he believed, would require national co-ordination in order to prevent, for example, the emergence of monopolies and the abuse of public resources. Centralised economic planning would be implemented through a democratic socialist system. Such a regime would outline limitations to freedom in a non-bureaucratic manner and ensure that ordinary people had a say on what was necessary, and why such limits needed to exist. At the centre of this socialist state would lie the power of democratic workplace institutions. Turner rejected a Western model of parliamentary democracy whereby citizens participated once every five years through the casting of a vote in national elections. Instead participation at enterprise level would allow for a sustained involvement in decision-making around the workplace and the society. At enterprise level workers would have to consider the economic problems of the enterprise and the provision of services to workers – housing, health facilities, food, education. For Turner this model contrasted with the Soviet style of communism. The Soviet Union had eliminated private ownership but no political institutions existed to enable people to assert control over the means of production. Communication between leadership and the people had broken

down and the leadership had retreated into personal gain and corruption or into the employment of coercive measures to force people into participation. The result was an undemocratic, inefficient state bureaucracy.[69] Turner concluded that, "The only real alternative is to ensure popular participation, based on workers control, in a context of political freedom."[70]

Turner did not explore the issue of how to construct and seize power but addressed himself rather to how participatory democracy in the workplace could be implemented and sustained. Nevertheless these early metal unionists incorporated his vision of participatory democracy into the way in which they sought to accrue power in the workplace. His vision of a democratic socialist society in contrast to the authoritarian bureaucratised Eastern European communist model further accorded with these unionists' aims. It is this focus on the power of the workplace as central to political change that characterised these early unionists' political vision and was why the term syndicalism was later often applied to them.

Syndicalism as a theory was indeed an alternative means of building power and effecting fundamental systemic change. It developed out of a strong anarchist and antiparliamentary tradition among the French working class in the late 1800s. The syndicalists, anarcho-syndicalists or revolutionary syndicalists as they were variously labelled, like the Marxist, were opposed to capitalism and aimed to foment class war from which the working class would emerge victorious and the capitalist state would be abolished. The syndicalists viewed the state as a tool of capitalist exploitation which was also rendered autocratic and inefficient owing to its bureaucratic structuring. They aimed to abolish the state and replace it with a social system, in the manner Turner advocated, where workers organized themselves into productive units. Their prime constituency through which to advance their ideas was the trade unions. They argued, like Gramsci, that the traditional function of unions to struggle for better wages and working conditions should be extended and they should be converted into sites of struggle which could bring about the end of capitalism and the state. Similarly, as Gramsci argued, unions would be centres of education where workers would be prepared to take over and administer factories and state utilities which they would operate,

> …according to the Syndicalist view, the trade union, the syndicate, is the unified organisation of labour and has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for the practical carrying out of reconstruction of social life after the pattern of Socialism. It has therefore a double purpose: 1. As the fighting organisation of the workers against the employers to enforce the demands of workers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living; 2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles.
>
> Anarcho–Sybndicalists are of the opinion that political parties, even when they bear a socialist name, are not fitted to perform either of these two tasks. The mere fact that, even

> in those countries where political Socialism commanded powerful organisations and had millions of voters behind it, the workers have never been able to dispense with trade unions, because legislation offered them no protection in their struggle for daily bread, testifies to this.
>
> …the trade union is…the germ of the Socialist economy of the future…Even revolutions can only develop and mature the germs which already exist and have made their way into the consciousness of men; they cannot themselves create these germs or generate new worlds out of nothing. It therefore concerns us to plant these germs…All the educational work of the Anarcho Syndicalists is aimed at this purpose.[71]

In the early 1900s the syndicalists acquired a strong following amongst super-exploited workers in France, Spain and Italy because of their uncompromising approach to employers. They were confrontational in their tactics and used continuous industrial action as a means of destabilising the state. Their ultimate mobilising tactic was the general strike which they believed was the most effective weapon to bring down the capitalist state.[72]

Similarities between the syndicalists and these metal unionists' approach to building power are evident. The committed focus on the workplace as a locus of power, their suspicion of parliamentary democracy as a form of democratic participation, the robustness of their challenge to capital, the use of the industrial action weapon, in particular the strike, to destabilise capital, and the employment of the power of the national strike to topple the regime were some of the parallels. Nowadays syndicalism is often equated with an excessive focus on shopfloor activity to the exclusion of any political perspective. Crouch, for example, uses the term thus.[73] The label is also sometimes applied, as this thesis will demonstrate, in this non-political manner, to a faction within Numsa. Yet as the history of syndicalism demonstrates it is a simplistic labelling for syndicalism in its original form was a profoundly anti-capitalist movement. What emerges in the history of these metal unions is that although their influences were varied they mainly demonstrated that their aspirations to the acquisition of power was deeply politically motivated. They were eclectic in their integration of new ideas and new tactics in their goal of building power. Many of these strategies had been used previously both in South African and European struggles against capitalist exploitation, and as intellectuals and socialists they debated such battles, the ideologies underpinning them, and how they were fought. These debates were in turn imbibed and processed by black organic intellectuals. What was unique however was how these unionists combined different concepts of building radical power to the South African context and thus were able to become a potent force in the workplace and political spheres.

The discussion concerning the amassing of power has thus far focussed, in Gramscian vein, on the contention that men make their own destinies within an historical context.[74] These metal unionists endorsed the conviction that they had the power to intervene in the course of history. The power they harnessed should not however be viewed as emanating from the adoption of organisational

and strategic interventions alone. Certain structural conditions existed which rendered the metal sector amenable to the accumulation of trade union power as struggles worldwide have demonstrated. From the 1960s into the early 1970s South Africa experienced sustained economic growth and maintained an average annual growth rate of 6 per cent. The manufacturing sector was central to this growth and metal and chemical products featured prominently. In an economy which was highly dependent on foreign capital, foreign investment in manufacturing had by 1969 risen to 31 percent exceeding for the first time the 25 per cent investment in mining.[75] Black labour was central component of this expansion and between 1960 and 1975 the number of blacks employed in manufacturing doubled.[76] Metal workers were herded together in factories and hostels, particularly on the East Rand which was the heart of the metal industry, which rendered them more easily available to recruitment into trade unions in large numbers. They could thus gain the benefits of `associational power` which Wright uses to describe workers` organizations, in particular trade unions and political parties.[77]

The expansion of the manufacturing sector meant that metal workers automatically held a structural marketplace bargaining power which Wright defines as the power that accrues to workers "simply from their location …in the economic system…from the strategic location of a particular group of
workers within a key industrial sector."[78] Numsa's different sectors varied in their access to this power and thus resorted to different manifestations of marketplace bargaining power. Wright details some of the forms that marketplace bargaining power can take. These include the possession of scarce skills and the ability for workers to remove themselves from the labour market and to survive on non-wage sources of income. He also itemizes low levels of unemployment as a form of marketplace power although such bargaining muscle was not available to metal workers in the period under review when unemployment steadily rose. Structural power, according to Wright, also emanates from workplace bargaining power where tight production processes are in existence. Such power is in evidence when whole assembly lines are shut down owing to a stoppage in a section of the line.[79] Fordism escalated workplace bargaining power because if its dependence on continuous flow production thus rendering capital vulnerable to hard hitting industrial action at the point of production. It also weakened capital owing to its incorporation of production processes under one corporation. Thus a plant producing crucial parts could prevent all other downstream plants from further production. The centralization of production into large corporations provided a structural weakness for workers to exploit. A strike in a centrally placed corporation or sector of industry can be especially effective if the economy heavily depends on it for the generation of foreign exchange. Certain industries too, such as the auto sector, held a structural power owing to their position in a global manufacturing order where multinational companies assembled and produced vehicles in numerous places around the world. This allowed workers to solicit solidarity from workers in the same multinational elsewhere particularly if these workers were strongly

unionized. Such a tactic was particularly useful if workers lent solidarity from the country where the corporations' headquarters were located.[80] All of these forms of structural power were present in the industries these metal unions organized and different sectors of the union, according to their position in the economy, relied on different forms of marketplace and workplace bargaining power to exploit capital's vulnerabilities.

Silver focuses on how the auto sector worldwide in the twentieth century was frequently the pioneer in the initial stages of unionization in different countries, cultural-political environments and in different historical periods. Organised autoworkers gained rapid victories despite recalcitrant employers, and at times antagonistic governments, and their struggles assumed a political significance beyond their factories, and industry to become `turning-points` in altered relations between capital and labour. Autoworkers were predominantly first and second generation migrants, and community support was a strong aspect of their struggles. The recurrence of the sit-down strike tactic, employed in strategic sections of the assembly line by a small number of activists in order to paralyze production, testified to their strong workplace bargaining power. Many of these unionized autoworkers experienced employer attempts to diminish their power through an increase in automation and the relocation of factories from established auto assembly sites. Their response uniformly was to engage in further industrial action in new locations. Silver cites such a pattern in early auto unionization attempts and employer responses in the USA, Western Europe, South Korea and Brazil. These characteristics, and in particular similarities to Brazil, are evident too in the South African autoworkers experience of building power.[81]

Silver also comments on how workers' belief in their own power and in the possibility of change is an important source of power in itself.[82] The knowledge that other workers have flexed their muscles successfully within the same industry, geographic area, country or in other countries of the world is a continuing source of strength and power.

The construction of power in the theories outlined above have implications for the strength of workers' control and independence in the contestation around where power ultimately comes to rest. For Michels, Lester and Crouch workers control in unions is steadily eroded and the initial goal for building power is undermined. The need for specialization, and the growth in a union bureaucracy with its own interests, shifts the locus of power away from its membership base. In this shift deals are struck with management to maintain industrial peace, spontaneous action is discouraged and the power base weakened. Crouch does not necessarily believe that a weakening of the shopfloor base is inevitable but rather stresses an unresolved tension that develops between two loci of power in the union. The national leadership level and the membership are not mutually supportive and the result is a reduction of workers' control and of working class power. In contrast Simkins, Gramsci and Turner stress the possibilities of developing sustainable workers' control or

democratic processes through the forging of democratic institutions and the establishment of a culture of democracy. Gramsci aims to deepen and extend democracy through the centrality of worker controlled politics. Workers in the factory must take the lead and a political party functions as an instrument of their control. It exists to assist them in their economic redistributive and political goals. Workers become leaders and intellectuals and leadership is not isolated in an independent political formation as a vangaurdist entity. Worker, and trade union independence from a political party is not necessary or desirable as both formations are working towards a single goal. Worker education, economic research, and strong organization is stressed as the means by which workers can assert their independent and vangaurdist role. Turner advocates a similar view that worker politics at factory level is the pillar upon which society is built. A socialist party exists alongside these collective factory units and is there to ensure that workers' control and democracy is maintained, that the economy is co-ordinated on a national level and that no factory collective absorbs more than its share of resources, or destroys the available national resources. The party and its collective workplace units are a democratic socialist expression in contrast to the Eastern European autocratic and bureaucratic expression of communism. The party is merely an expression of workers' needs. It is not necessary for them to maintain a separate identity as workers' control drives its existence.

The syndicalists on the other hand express a scepticism towards all political formations and advocate an independence from this form of control. Power is located in worker organization alone. They do however advocate power in the unity of workers through regional co-operation and co-ordination between productive units in `labour cartels` which `constitute the centre for local propaganda and education.`[83] Moreover, "Every trade union is federatively allied with all the organizations in the same trade throughout the country, and these in turn with all related trades, so that all are combined in general industrial alliances. It is the task of these alliances to arrange for co-operative action of local groups, to conduct solidaric strikes… and to meet all the demands of the day to day struggle of capital and labour."[84] Parliamentary democracy, or socialist democratic centralism, are political structures which are seen as distanced from workers' concerns and as a prime means of displacing workers' control. Power is located in workers' independence and control at the point of production where an equitable, democratic, and redistributive society can be forged.

The notion underpinning these latter theorists is that power is built by workers for workers. Any political or other institutions are created merely to reinforce and express workers' control at the point of production. It is continuous educative, organizational and other democratic practices which ensure on-going workers' control and independence from capitalist, and bureaucratic redistributive expressions of power. Such ideas were to be expressed in a particular manner in these metal unions and would prove to be a source of considerable power and contention and

would be applied with varying degrees of success.

Part 2 Building local power: movement in waiting (1970s)

1. Introduction

"I heard talk about how we had to fight for ourselves. This was all new to me but I was interested in what they were saying. They were preaching unity and power."[85] Moses Mayekiso recalled his first visit to the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) offices in the early 1970s in this way. At the time he had no idea that these concepts of `unity` and `power` would enable the union movement over the next twenty years to usher in unprecedented changes to thousands of South African workplaces, and into the South African apartheid landscape itself. Power, however, can be exercised in numerous ways, and takes many different forms. As previously outlined, Macun defines trade union and working class power through three useful concepts, namely *working class power*, *organisational powe*r, and *institutional power*. In assessing union power all levels are important and interact to shape the degree of power that unions can exercise in a particular moment.[86]

Numsa's steady accumulation of power followed decades of relative powerlessness for black workers. It was the condition of that powerlessness that Numsa had first to overcome to become a potent industrial force. To understand Numsa's achievements it is first necessary to understand the problems it faced. This requires a brief review of developments in South African labour history over the last century. The review serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides the context out of which South African trade unions grew in the twentieth century and explains why African non-racial trade unions could only take off in the late 1970s and 1980s. Secondly it highlights aspects of the history which profoundly influenced the strategies that metal unionists pursued in the 1980s. Macun's categories can profitably be utilised in examining these developments.

2. Background to period under review

The history of modern South Africa is one of struggle, and conflict between colonial powers and indigenous people, and owners and dispossessed. Colonialism brought with it a population of permanent white settlers who shaped the political and economic landscape in important ways. By the time the colonial power Britain, withdrew in 1910, South African was constituted as a racially exclusive state dominated by a white settler minority. Over time the resistance of the oppressed African majority took the form of a struggle for national liberation in which the ANC (African National Congress) assumed a leading role.

In this story of conflict and dispossession the plentiful supply of cheap labour was central. The discovery of gold in Johannesburg in 1886 augmented the hunger for cheap labour as mining capitalists experienced the high costs associated with deep level mining. In order to prevent desertions from the mines, and to channel labour to mines in need of workers the South African Republic in 1896 tightened influx control legislation, which had been in existence in the Transvaal since 1870, in an attempt further to control the movement of African labour.[87] More drastic action was needed however to ensure a steady flow of labour to the mines. By emphasising that gold mining was the economic foundation of the country, the Chamber of Mines (founded in 1887) prevailed on the Transvaal government to find a means of forcing African subsistence farmers off the land. In response the Volksraad introduced a number of taxes, including the poll tax which was levied annually on every adult male, to force Africans off the land and into wage labour. Taxation however proved inadequate to coerce sufficient labour into the mines. Ultimately in 1913 the government promulgated the Land Act which confined Africans to one tenth of the land and deprived black farmers of South Africa's most productive land. Widespread starvation resulted forcing thousands of rural Africans into wage labour.[88]

Mine owners established recruiting agencies to centralise, and control, the supply of African labour from the rural areas to the mines thus setting a pattern over the next century for the utilisation of cheap migrant unskilled labour in mines and factories. Migrant workers were housed in compounds to allow for maximum control over their lives including their ability to form trade unions. For the next 60 years mine employers fixed the wages of these miners which were calculated on the upkeep of a single man. Compounds however, brought workers together and although African mine workers were not organised into unions in the early part of the twentieth century they waged some large, if unsuccessful, strikes.[89] Skilled work in the mines was performed by immigrant white miners some of whom brought their knowledge of trade unions to South Africa and organised themselves into craft unions. They bargained over wages and conditions and engaged in militant industrial action, but demonstrated scant solidarity with African workers. Some of these early craft unions included skilled coloured and Indian workers, but excluded Africans who were largely employed as unskilled labour. A general strike in 1922 by white workers was pivotal in its implications for the building of working class power. Workers mobilised on a racist ticket informed by a fear that mine capitalists would dismantle the colour bar and introduce semi-skilled black labour into the mines who would in turn undercut their wages. The strike developed into a generalised insurrection on the Rand which brought down the government. It was brutally suppressed but was to have significant consequences for the future of labour in South Africa. In the 1924 elections white workers, represented through the Labour Party, formed a pact with the National Party which allowed it to accede to power on condition that it introduced legislation favourable to white workers. The Pact Government promulgated laws which reserved the most skilled jobs for white workers, and in 1923 enacted the Industrial Conciliation

Act (ICA) which established South Africa's first industrial relations framework. The ICA granted legal recognition to white, coloured and Indian trade unions and allowed for employers and unions to create industrial councils for the purposes of bargaining to reach agreements which had the status of law. Pass-bearing Africans were barred from belonging to registered unions and hence African labour could not enjoy the benefits of the industrial relations machinery. The Act laid the basis for employers' future refusal to recognise African unions. The white unions employed their seats on industrial councils to sign agreements with employers which excluded Africans from training and from skilled jobs. In this way white workers inaugurated an industrial relations system which would protect their interests for many years to come and which would fracture working class power along ethnic lines. In the process African workers were denied the ability to influence labour policy or to create institutions of political power owing to their citizenless status. [90]

Although there were instances in the 1920s of African workers engaging in strike action and of attempts to organise Africans into unions (both industrial and general), these initiatives lacked a sustained and effective organisational focus and suffered continuous state harassment.[91] Significant changes unfolded however in the 1930s. The Witwatersrand economy was transformed by an intense period of industrialisation. An equally concentrated process of first generation male African urbanisation ensued from the mid-1930s into the early 1940s. This generation of unskilled male migrants retained close links with their rural homesteads, remitting earnings to their families, and returning at the end of each contracted year of work. The labour market was highly unstable. African male labour turnover on the Witwatersrand, for example, exceeded 100 per cent in most industrial sectors. An exceptionally racist and autocratic supervision characterised the factory floor and at least 30 percent of job changes were the result of dismissal. In the 1940s however the character of this labour force began to change as both migrant, and immigrant Africans, including women, who chose to reside in urban areas, began to flood into towns. Many preferred to labour in the manufacturing sector where, in contrast to mine employment, they were better remunerated by means of weekly wages. This group of workers committed itself to permanent residence in an urban area and it became increasingly common not to remit earnings to rural homesteads. Many resided in squatter camps where the emergence of squatter movements provided a point of identification and stability in this amorphous land invasion. The squatter movements were chiefly engaged in agitating for affordable housing and their efforts resulted in a radical shift in state policy. When the National Party took power in 1948 it decided to stabilise a section of the urban African population through the provision of family accommodation and education whilst simultaneously applying more stringently influx control to new entrants into urban areas.[92]

The scale of this permanent immigrant population should not however be overemphasised. Large numbers of migrants in the workforce in the 1940s were significantly to undermine the basis of

both working class and organisational power. Whilst cleavages became more pronounced between more and less permanent Africans in the labour force, an unusual alliance of African and white workers came to the fore. During the Second World War the South African economy boomed and hundreds of new factories emerged. White male labour were recruited into the armed forces and thus the workforce, particularly in the manufacturing sector, became more black and more female. In this context, where labour's bargaining power was strong and urbanisation continued apace, trade union struggles flourished. Industrial action escalated dramatically from 1941 onwards and in 1942 strike action attained a 20 year high. Some strikes were small others involved over a thousand workers. As a result of this increase in worker militancy, black workers experienced a considerable rise in real wages even if this did not always keep pace with escalating inflation. Between 1938/9 and 1944/5 the pay of an average African worker rose by 96 percent. A significant reduction in the gap between average African, Indian and white wages was also apparent mainly as a result of greater militancy amongst black workers than white workers. Successful strikes resulting in improved wages extended black union membership and provided a basis for multiracial co-operation. The SA Trades and Labour Council (SATLC) maintained a policy of non-racial affiliation and black membership grew causing registered unions to become increasingly multi-racial in this period. The two largest strikes of the war occurred in the garment and retail trades and both involved multi-racial solidarity, chiefly between African men and white Afrikaner women. The 17 day strike at the OK Bazaars, for example, involved members of the white National Union of Distributive Workers and its African parallel the African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union. Management conceded to their demands which included a closed shop and higher wages. It should be noted however that many white unions were not open to joint multiracial action and in general unions dominated by white men were less militant than those of white women and less likely to involve black workers.[93]

Membership of black unions peaked in 1944 and thereafter progressively declined. This was partly due to a number of repressive government War Measures and a decision by the United Party not to recognise African trade unions in response to escalating black militancy and non-racial co-operation. Structural problems too militated against the building of organisational power. A high proportion of Africans in manufacturing, and most in mining, were migrants which lead to a rapid turnover of labour and unstable union organisation. Union membership was frequently dismissed from employment and this was accompanied by long returns to rural areas followed by a change of job on return. A low level of union leadership accountability, including a wide gap between the incomes of officials and members, also resulted in a weakening of the labour movement and membership passivity.[94] National union organisation had not been forged, the largest concentration of African unions was in Johannesburg, and union members often remained isolated in single factories.[95] Evident weaknesses and obstacles to working class power were apparent.

The United Party's vacillation, particularly in relation to black labour militancy which the huge 1946 mineworkers' strike graphically demonstrated, and the intensification of black urbanisation, were important factors in the victory of the Herenigde National Party (the Nationalists) in 1948. Its assumption to power is seen by commentators as a decisive shift in the balance of forces in South Africa and a significant break in working class history.[96] From the mid 1930s a number of initiatives had contributed to the unifying of various class layers in the Afrikaner constituency. Such initiatives as the Reddingsdaadbond (Rescue Action Association) worked ceaselessly to unite Afrikaners by means of economic and cultural activities. It mobilised disparate groups of Afrikaners such as the petit bourgeoisie, emerging capitalists, farmers, and specific categories of white labour on the basis that they were discriminated against as Afrikaners. Each group perceived themselves as victims of a large urbanised and militant African working class. The `economic movement ` too was crucial in the development of Afrikaner nationalism between 1934 – 1948. It was an organised attempt by Afrikaner petit bourgeois groups to secure a basis for capital accumulation in the industrial and commercial sectors. The movement effected a transition from an Afrikaner rural base to an important stake by Afrikaners in an urban economy. Out of this movement emerged powerful Afrikaner financial and industrial capital such as Volkskas, Sanlam, Asokor, and Rembrandt. Later, the Nationalists[97] successfully effected an alliance of different Afrikaner class interests and organised an alliance of Transvaal, Cape and Orange Free State farmers through the ideological concept of `oorstrooming`, or the inundation of cities by the `swaart gevaar` (black threat) who were demanding union recognition, higher wages, and political equality. The Nationalist 1948 election victory created an environment which allowed for the flourishing of capitalist accumulation, not only for Afrikaners, but by all white capitalist classes on the basis of the exploitation of black labour.[98]

Although O'Meara asserts that the "RDB (Reddingsdaadbond) wove a cultural mesh around Afrikaner workers"[99], Alexander believes this claim, and the assertion that white workers were a large constituency in voting the Nationalists into power in 1948, is exaggerated. He asserts that a minority of workers voted it into power which it seized by a very small margin. Garment worker leader and anti-apartheid opponent Solly Sachs was voted by white workers into a prominent position at the SATLC's 1948 conference and 15 thousand workers marched to protest his banning under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1952. Alexander dismisses too the thesis that white workers colluded in bringing the Nationalists to power because they experienced the threat of growing numbers of semi-skilled black operatives and black advancement.[100] According to him the growth of semi-skilled employment was slight and Africans who were recruited to such positions were promoted to the lowest grades and thus few changes to the job hierarchy were visible. He contends that the massive growth in the urban workforce had resulted in white farmers experiencing difficulties in recruiting labour and it was chiefly this constituency who made a Nationalist victory possible. Migrancy and differentials in skill, he believes, was at the basis of the

gulf between black and white labour solidarity. [101]

Ultimately however white workers were absorbed into the apartheid Nationalist project and the glimmer that the 1940s held for the building of working class power and unity across racial lines was extinguished. Ethnic cleavages remained largely intact. By the end of the 1940s working class power both black and white had been severely dented.

Facing growing poverty in the African reserves, in the 1950s large numbers of migrant workers spent longer periods labouring in the cities where townships and shanty towns continued to grow. The stabilisation of the urban black population under the Nationalist government was accompanied by a succession of stringent economic pressures and restrictive laws. At the end of 1954 the Minister of Native Affairs raised rentals on municipal housing by up to 75 percent. Transport costs trebled. The African urban workforce came under intense economic pressure. Simultaneously a series of laws passed during the course of the 1950s rendered African workers' access to institutional power even more remote. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) smashed the more militant trade unions by removing pivotal office bearers. These were often the most competent organisers. The 1953 Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act and the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act confirmed the prohibition on African workers joining registered trade unions and also prohibited Africans from participating in strikes. Coloured and Indian members of registered unions were forced into segregated branches controlled by a white executive and their militancy and independence was curtailed. The 1924 Act had legislated a deep divide between Africans and white workers; now the Amendment separated coloureds and Indians from white workers. The Nationalists also introduced a system of job reservation whereby the Minister of Labour could set aside any jobs for whites. Thus job reservation was extended into new areas of employment, such as clothing, and a racially defined hierarchy of labour was formally instituted. In 1952 further influx control laws were promulgated chiefly through the Native Laws Amendment Act which were made equally applicable to men and women. The legislation inhibited African immigration into urban areas and resulted in the continual harassment of black urban dwellers. The pass laws were bitterly resented and provided a strong impetus for Africans to engage in politics.[102]

By 1954 the SATLC had foresaken black trade unionism and reconstituted itself into what was to become the Trade Union Council of South Africa (Tucsa) which was tolerated by the Nationalist government. A lacuna existed for the organisation of half a million African workers. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) emerged into this space in 1955 and united 33 unions and 37 203 workers in manufacturing and service industries. It aimed to eliminate racially structured trade unions through the adoption of a non-racial constitution, and to de-racialise the state through an alignment with a militant black nationalism which had in large measure been

provoked by the brutal repression of the 1946 mineworkers strike. Sactu attempted to build a powerful organisational coherence and to struggle for institutional political power for African people through an alliance with the ANC. Meanwhile the South African Communist Party (SACP) had aligned itself with the ANC. The latter had in 1949 launched a `Programme of Action` based on civil disobedience in which it recognised the centrality of working class support for its campaigns. In response to Nationalist attacks, the Congress Alliance[103] took action through a series of non-violent resistance campaigns. In 1955 it convened the Congress of the People in order to formulate demands for a democratic South Africa in a document known as the Freedom Charter.[104]

Such developments were underpinned by the `internal colonialism` thesis formulated by SACP chair Michael Harmel in the early 1950s and which came to dominate left thinking. Trade unionism was seen as important but secondary to the national struggle. The theory held that South Africa consisted of a formerly settler, and now permanent, white middle class which stood in exploitative relation to 80 per cent of the rightless, indigenous black population. The `colonialism of a special type` argument influenced political strategy and resulted in the contention that in the first stage of struggle institutional and economic barriers to the oppressed needed to be removed in a national struggle which would be waged by an alliance of black classes. Thereafter, once the liberation movement had defeated the minority government, working class interests would diverge from those of the black bourgeoisie and a new stage of working class struggle would commence. Thus the
priority was to build a national liberation movement which most Africans would support owing to their experience of racial oppression.[105]

Sactu's unions adopted this position with uneven commitment. The older established unions, chiefly in the Transvaal, engaged mainly in `orthodox unionism` which centred on workplace collective bargaining matters and they embraced Sactu's policies reluctantly. The weaker and more recently constituted unions, especially in Natal, adopted a political unionism which attempted to link factory struggles with community and state power issues and to thereby strengthen and develop Sactu's weak base. Some commentators, such as Friedman,[106] have viewed the ANC's alliance with Sactu as largely instrumental as it required large numbers to support its campaigns and trade unions provided a useful recruitment ground. Lambert contends however that `political unionism` as practised in Natal through factory linkages at national and local levels in national resistance campaigns facilitated the rapid development of unions. The growth of Natal unions outstripped that in other regions as workers engaged in the Congress Movement's four national protest campaigns between 1955 and 1961.[107] Yet Lambert acknowledges that the Congress leadership was often ignorant of the difficulties of building sustainable workplace organisation believing it to be secondary to rapid mobilisation against state power before fascism took hold.

The slow building of democratic organisation was sidelined as a result and factory structures were often not solid. Few shopsteward committees existed and as a result workers had little power on the factory floor. National solidarity within, and across, economic sectors was also not well developed.[108] Yet even where organisation was more solid, structural conditions in the economy militated against strong trade union organisation. A Transvaal strike at Amato Textile Mills in Benoni demonstrates this but also pointed to future possibilities for union organisation in a more industrialised context. Industrial workers only represented about half the urban employed in Benoni and about a quarter, 4 400, were Amato workers who were drawn from the urbanised working class of Benoni's locations. Amato was thus an unusually large concern and was also at the cutting edge of technological innovation. Such factors combined with the continuous operations conducted by the company furnished workers with an unusually strong bargaining position for the times. Amato was unionised by Sactu's Textile Workers Industrial Union which had waged a successful recognition strike in 1952. Thereafter workers waged a prolonged struggle to increase wages. In 1958, 4 000 workers struck for higher wages but were brutally attacked by police and 340 were later endorsed out of the city. Low levels of industrialisation meant that minimal Sactu organisation existed in Benoni, and indeed on the Witwatersrand, where Sactu had only 15 000 members and where most factories were small. Thus Amato strikers could not rely on organised support from other workers or unions in Benoni, across the Rand, or across the country and Amato's pocket of resistance was crushed.[109]

A confused anti-pass campaign was waged in 1960 when both the Pan African Congress (PAC) and the ANC conducted separate campaigns. The campaign culminated in the police killing 69 demonstrators during the PAC's Sharpeville action which was followed by the state's sustained operation to destroy black political resistance. It declared a state of emergency and banned a number of organisations including the ANC and PAC. In response, the ANC abandoned its passive resistance strategy and endorsed a military struggle which began a campaign of sabotage on strategic institutions and electricity installations. This provoked a progressively more brutal response from the state which forced the ANC, PAC and Sactu into exile where the ANC developed its military capacity and lobbied for sanctions to isolate the illegitimate white regime. By 1964 Sactu was decimated through mass arrests and imprisonment of its leadership.[110] Its weak factory structures were unable to generate a second layer of leadership.[111] Thus a combination of brutal state power, Sactu going into exile, organisational unevenness, resources which only allowed for the recruitment of a fraction of the unskilled, a mobile black industrial working class, and insufficient time to consolidate factory structures was to end this flurry of heroic activity.

The 1960s ushered in a period of industrial peace for the Nationalists accompanied by a booming economy unfettered by political unrest and underpinned by a plentiful supply of cheap labour. The economy underwent a structural transformation as it experienced a large influx of foreign capital, a

huge expansion in the manufacturing sector and a growing concentration of ownership. Between 1960 and 1970 the South African Gross National Product (GNP) escalated from R 5 200 million to R12 400 million.[112] At the end of this period a high level of concentration of capital existed. By 1977 the Monopolies Commission reported that five percent of the total number of firms in the manufacturing sector accounted for 63 per cent of the sector's turnover. The economy was characterised by a few large conglomerates which had extensive interests in most branches of the economy, a number of multinational companies, and some large parastatals.[113] It was in this context that the Nationalists turned their attention to consolidating the apartheid state.

From its accession to power, Nationalist policies were directed at managing the contradictions that a growing economy dependent on the provision of cheap black labour resulting in escalating African urbanisation, engendered. It thus embarked on a comprehensive process of state restructuring which was underpinned by a racial ideology buttressed by pre-existing systems of racial domination. Thus the high, or grand apartheid era was characterised by the growth in the size and powers of state apparatuses.[114] The government's social engineering in this period rested on four pillars strengthened through a plethora of new laws. The first pillar, and the central thrust in the resolution of its `urban problem`, was the strengthening of existing influx control measures. Previously influx control mechanisms had foundered chiefly because they had relied on a scale of administrative intervention which the state was unable to provide. Now the expansion of the mining and manufacturing sectors provided increased revenues, and the decade of the 1960s saw a consolidation of administrative structures to more effectively police influx control laws. Under Minster of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, the Native Affairs Department expanded into a influential organ of state power which guided critical legislation through the white parliament. Laws such as the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Population Registration Act (1950), separated people of different races in a strategy of divide and rule. In the 1960s the Nationalists developed further policies on black urbanisation and promulgated the 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act and its consolidation in the 1970 Bantu Homelands Citizen Act. It rejected the differentiation between urbanised and non-urbanised blacks and redefined all Africans as permanent inhabitants of ethnic homelands (Bantustans) unless they had worked for 10 continuous years with one employer or resided in the same location for 15 years. Thus regardless of people's connection with the impoverished rural areas, the status of most Africans reverted to that of migrant workers permitted to reside temporarily in urban areas for work purposes. The Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act (1959) allocated a homeland for each ethnic group including for whites who owned 70 per cent of the land. An accelerated policy of forced removals of African communities from `white`areas accompanied these urbanisation controls.[115] Over one million labour tenants and farm squatters, and 400 000 city dwellers, were resettled in the 1960s whilst the population of the Bantustans increased by 70 per cent.[116]

The second pillar of Nationalist reconstruction rested on the concentration of power in white, especially Afrikaner, hands. Heavy penalties were meted out to those whom the state suspected of furthering the aims of a banned organisation or of crossing the racial barrier. Laws were promulgated which conferred greater powers on the police and military. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act was now joined by the Sabotage Act of 1963 and the 1967 Terrorism Act which introduced a new range of offences and provided for indefinite detention. In 1969 the Bureau for State Security (Boss) was established to safeguard internal security, the Department of Military Intelligence (DMI) was invested with more extensive powers, and enormous powers were placed in the hands of cabinet ministers.[117] The third pillar of Nationalist rule was the apartheid welfare regime which separated all social services. Differentiated education institutions, health facilities, and pension services were created and in all of these whites were allocated a significantly higher proportion of the state budget whilst Africans were allocated the least.[118]

The apartheid workplace was the final pillar bolstering the apartheid regime. The most skilled jobs were reserved for whites whilst simultaneously many white wage earners moved into the middle management stratum of supervisors and controllers. African labour was located in the unskilled, lowest paid, hardest, dirtiest, most tedious and most dangerous jobs. The segregation of workplace facilities was reinforced by the passage of the Factories Act which dictated that employers should provide racially separated amenities such as change rooms, canteens and toilets.

From the mid 1960s onwards the structure of the economy began to change as agriculture and mining declined and manufacturing, commerce, finance, and services rose in importance.[119] Accompanying these changes was a growth in the number of workers entering the formal economy. Between 1960 and 1980 the number of Africans working in manufacturing grew from 308 332 to 780 914. The introduction of mass, mechanised production in manufacturing resulted in a shortage of semi-skilled labour. Until the 1960s skilled white artisans controlled the metal industry through powerful craft unions. By the mid 1960s however white labour had struck a compromise with employers whereby it agreed to tolerate the upward mobility of black labour in exchange for higher wages and the reservation of more skilled grades of employment.[120] Subsequently employers mechanised widely, divided up skilled jobs, and began to employ large numbers of African semi-skilled machine operators. Hindson and Crankshaw noted that, "Unskilled jobs actually declined over the period [1965 -1985] from about 300 000 to under 200 000, while semi-skilled jobs increased from about 400 000 to over 800 000... The biggest change in the occupational and racial structure was the movement of African workers from unskilled into semi-skilled jobs."[121] In Crankshaw's contention this, "had important implications for trade union organisation[122], although such organisation was not to emerge in this decade. Sitas enumerates the move away from unskilled work in each sector of the metal industry between 1965 -1977, "...in basic metal from 70.97 to 49.47; transport equipment from 63 to 39 % and machinery 69 to 47%.

The increases in African production workers are 20 to 36% in basic metal; 23 to 46 in machinery; 31 to 48.7% in transport equipment."[123] As a result of the movement of Africans into semi-skilled machine operative jobs , they experienced a rise in wages which although not great was nevertheless significant.[124] Such increases appeared to dampen African workers' militancy until the recession of the 1970s began to seriously erode these gains. A growth in the employment of African female labour mainly into the less physically arduous electronics sector was also observable. However, the majority of the workforce remained male (in metal and mining, by 1988 African women made up only 3 per cent of the workforce[125]). Prior to the 1970s African labour had no access to training and thus promotional possibilities were denied them. At the end of the 1970s Africans were finally admitted into apprenticeships but by this time the demand for artisans had decreased and many whites had moved into higher paid supervisory positions.[126] Von Holdt notes that at Highveld Steel in Witbank the movement of blacks into semi-skilled positions was resisted by white workers but this was mitigated by the ease with which the latter could find employment. Management approved of the strong work ethic of black operatives compared to that of whites. Decision-making positions remained in the hands of whites, and autocratic managements dictated work conditions and changes in workplace organisation. Company policy was implemented by white supervisors and foreman in an arbitrary and, at times abusive, manner. In Von Holdt's words `power in the workplace was racially constituted`.[127] In the 1960s African unskilled unemployment emerged for the first time. Unemployment rose from 582 000 in 1962 to 750 000 in 1966 and reached a million by the early 1970s.[128]

The 1960s thus came to a close in a manner that presented formidable obstacles for those wishing to represent black workers' concerns. Working class power had been unevenly built over a period of 50 years in what Ross terms "a history of quite extraordinary organisational instability".[129] White labour were separated from black, cleavages existed between African, Indian and coloured workers owing to differing organisational rights and urbanisation policies, and African workers themselves were divided from each other through differential rights to reside in urban areas. Working class organisational power was almost non-existent. White trade unions engaged in institutional bargaining on industrial councils where they negotiated improved benefits and token minimum wage floors as the segregated labour market permitted them to demand wages far in excess of the minima. Solidarity with black workers was a thing of the past and an hostility to black competition expressed itself though the exclusion of black workers from training opportunities. As Alexander observes, " …`race` was not the only basis for divisions within the working class. `Skill` had a major impact on wages and trade union organisation…"[130] Coloured and Indian trade unions, where they existed, expressed a similar lack of solidarity with African labour whilst their bargaining power was severely weakened by the racially constituted hierarchy of workplace power and limited opportunities for acquiring further skills. Trade union power was at its lowest ebb since the onset of industrialisation. Linked to the absence of workplace

organisational power was black labour's inability to participate in, or shape the rules of engagement, in industrial relations and political institutions.

Yet new possibilities were revealing themselves. In the 1940s industrial development was uneven and this militated against the emergence of a strong trade union movement. In the 1950s and 1960s industry underwent modernisation, large national companies developed and a more settled and homogenous proletariat emerged.[131] Political stability and tough financial measures raised business confidence and direct foreign investment grew by over 60 per cent as multinationals expanded their operations. In the late 1960s large injections of capital resulted in a 9.3 per cent growth in the economy.[132] The growth in all sectors, the emergence of large numbers of semi-skilled Africans, and the development of monopoly capitalism had brought large numbers of workers together in production. These conditions would provide an organisational base for the industrial unions which would emerge in the 1970s.

The 1960s was a decade when state interventions from above predominated. In the 1970s a challenge from below erupted. The contestation that surfaced would again force the apartheid state to adjust its policies shaped as they were `simultaneously by struggles from below and interventions from above.`[133] The Nationalists attempts in the 1960s to socially engineer the labour market was to give way to the reformist strategies of the 1970s and 1980s. Shifts in government policy would reveal opportunities for black workers to exploit.

3. The 1970s: new possibilities

In the 1970s South Africa's political and economic stability was ruptured. This was the result of a number of factors which caused deep African discontent and resentment. By 1973 a decline in the economy was apparent and by 1976 it was in full recession. Investment in manufacturing declined by 13 per cent between 1975 and 1977 and the growth rate was negative in 1976, nil in 1977 and negative in 1978.[134] By 1978 the apartheid economy was manifesting deep structural problems. Migrant workers began to feel the squeeze simultaneous with the collapse of their rural homelands. In the words of metal workers on the East Rand, 1969 – 1977 were `lean years` [135]. Already overcrowded reserves experienced rapid deterioration brought on by government forced relocations of over 2 million people which resulted in smaller subsistence plots ("They were moving people from the farms, moving them to barren places, to Tin Town, to Nqutu, to Ezakheni and other places…They were starving the people"; and by population growth, ("Average population density rose from 60 persons per square mile in 1955 to 110 in 1969. Production of subsistence requirements in the late 60s being less than two-thirds of the 1955 level[136]). This was accompanied by a more stringent application of influx control laws as large numbers of desperate people exited devastated rural areas in search of work. In this context two spontaneous events in the 1970s, one labour and one student related, erupted which were to have profound implications

for both the political course of the country, and for industrial relations.

In January 1973 spontaneous strikes in the Durban industrial centre of Pinetown erupted. An estimated 70 000 workers in different industries in about 146 plants[137] (about 22 of these were metal factories[138]) downed tools and demonstrated that beneath the quiescence of the 1960s rankled a resentment at low wages and stressful working conditions in the face of flourishing industries and employer prosperity. In the early 1970s inflation eroded wages as labour confronted price rises of up to 40 per cent on basic goods.[139] In 1973 the average African pay was R13 a week, well below the R18 stipulated by the Poverty Datum Line. The strikes brought to the fore the inadequacies of South Africa's dual labour relations system and signalled a reawakening of working class militancy and the rebirth of African trade unions. Following the strikes, a number of new trade unions were formed, including the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu), which aimed to organise African workers around the issues that had sparked the industrial unrest. The strikes shocked employers into a realisation that new systems of control were necessary. On employer recommendation, the state promulgated the 1973 Bantu Labour Relations Act (an amendment to the 1953 Settlement of Disputes Act) and introduced joint management/ worker structures known as liaison committees. Between 1973 and 1975, 1 751 in-factory liaison committees were established as employers sensed a growing crisis of control in their factories.[140] It soon became apparent however that liaison committees were no substitute for union organisation as strikes erupted where such structures existed. Between 1973 and 1976 yearly numbers of African workers involved in industrial action never fell below 30 000.[141]

The next rupture in the fabric of the apartheid state occurred in 1976. In the economic boom of the early 1970s industry experienced a shortage of skilled manpower. It thus pressured the state to provide improved black education. The Nationalists had permitted a degradation of township education over the previous decade in favour of homeland schooling but under pressure from capital it invested huge resources into new education facilities. In Soweto, for example, 40 new schools were built by 1974 and the student population grew to double the size (170 000) of the secondary school intake in 1969. The growth of black high schools, colleges and universities produced a new educated elite. In the late 1960s a number of these intellectuals embraced the Black Consciousness (BC) ideology. They founded the South African Students Organisation (Saso) in 1969 and the Black People's Convention in 1972 both of which mobilised blacks as a group on the basis of their skin colour. The movement was partly responsible for June 16, 1976, when black students demonstrated in large numbers against the Bantu education system and tuition in Afrikaans. Protests were repressed with great brutality by the state and whilst students won little the ripple effects were significant. `Soweto '76` marked the beginning of a sustained onslaught on the apartheid state by the black population.[142] According to O'Meara, the

> Soweto (uprising) finally forced the NP (Nationalist Party) to concede the one political

> advantage to which Verwoerd had been determined to cling – its own belief in the morality of Grand Apartheid… From now on, the NP would be largely on the defensive, desperately seeking ways to regain the political initiative – and to restore economic growth…Soweto regenerated a deep sense of pride in much of the black population. It was the key catalyst of the psychological liberation which the Black Consciousness movement had worked so hard to produce.[143]

The uprising also marked the resurgence of the ANC in the South African political landscape. Although the state believed the ANC was behind the unrest, there was little direct connection. In the wake of the uprising, however, thousands of young people fled to neighbouring countries and many were recruited into the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). A shift away from the black consciousness ideology was in large measure due to the influence of the well resourced ANC military camps in comparison to those of the PAC which was the logical home for those espousing this ideology. From 1977 onwards MK launched a growing number of attacks on pivotal economic and political targets inside South Africa.[144] The children of the Soweto riots were also the workers of tomorrow and from the late 1970s onwards a wave of politically conscious students entered the labour force. They were to be highly responsive to trade union organising initiatives.

Renewed trade union organisation in the wake of the 1973 strikes, and the mobilisation of the black youth around Bantu education, resulted in new political alignments in the Nationalist Party. Reformers (Verligtes) became dominant in government and a new prime minister, PW Botha, replaced the vacillating , B J Vorster. The Botha administration initiated a process of reforming apartheid supported by an odd assortment of Afrikaner businessmen, the military, and Afrikaner liberals. In Botha's government the SADF (South African Defence Force) played a significant policy making role. On its instigation Botha pursued a `total strategy` and reform programme in response to an ostensible `total onslaught` through which he hoped to unite his party and the white population. The `total strategy` aimed to reduce foreign pressure on apartheid, remove the Marxist ANC from South Africa's borders, and promote a black middle class to counter radical township activity. Concerning the latter, two significant commissions were appointed, the Riekert and Wiehahn, respectively to investigate the free movement of Africans, and the restrictive labour laws. The 1979 Riekert Report promoted the reform strategy of dividing the African population into urban `insiders` and homeland `outsiders`. The urban insiders however were no longer to be temporary sojourners as recommendations to remove petty apartheid strictures, including the pass laws, indicated. Simultaneously the Wiehahn Commission recommended that Africans be brought into the industrial relations system and that job reservation be scrapped.[145] In 1979 the Minister of Labour abolished job reservation (except in mining) and in the same year an agreement between Seifsa (Steel & Engineering Federation of South Africa) and the white trade unions abolished closed shop agreements barring Africans from certain grades of work.[146] The adoption of the findings of these Commissions would importantly alter the apartheid landscape in the 1980s.

It was in this economic and political context that Numsa's predecessors began to organise coloured, Indian and African workers. Each of these unions had a different history and roots yet they all in various ways entered a new phase of organisation in the 1970s. For those organising Africans, the obstacles were the greatest but for those who had initially organised coloured and Indian workers the challenge remained to transform their organisations and forge a non-racial unity with African workers. Although greater opportunities revealed themselves for organising black workers in the 1970s, these unionists still confronted formidable obstacles in the form of a repressive state, hostile employers and a divided working class.

4. An independent union: Metal & Allied Workers Union

This thesis explores Numsa's construction of power in the 1980s, but it is important to highlight certain organisational patterns that emerged in the 1970s as these small beginnings significantly contributed to its independent style. It will become clear in this overview that Numsa was a hybrid of different union traditions and that this would influence its ability to construct considerable power in the late 1980s. Its history is a complex web of organisations all of which emerged in the 1970s. For reasons of clarity this thesis will separate out these different strands and trace their respective paths as they slowly move towards each other to form one powerful organisation in 1987. The first thread to be considered is the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu).

Mawu members recall the conditions under which they laboured before the coming of the unions in the 1970s. Their recollections illustrate the nature of the employers with which Mawu was confronted. A worker from a kitchenware factory, Prestige in Pietermaritzburg, remembers that it was mostly women who pressed metal objects into shape in what an employer described as a `very masculine type of environment`[147] owing to the strength needed to operate the presses. Besides the arduous nature of the work, it was repetitious, hot and noisy as presses continuously clanged while they tore through sheets of metal. No safety regulations were in place and no provision was made for earplugs, gloves, overalls, or fans to contend with the heat. The women started work at 7.30 am and ended at 10.30 pm, and in 1974 were earning R6.30 a week accompanied by an erratic payment of overtime. Dismissal without explanation was common, as was termination of employment on pregnancy. The least arduous jobs were reserved for whites and wage increases were allocated arbitrarily on `merit`. She recalls, "When the boss liked you, he gave you an increase. But when he did not like you, no matter how hard you worked he did not give you an increase."[148]

Alfred Qabula recalled his entry into Dunlop in 1974 where workers had to fill in forms with personal details, "In these papers there was a trick question: `If you are requested to work overtime will you agree or refuse?` You could say nothing but `yes` - if you said `no` you had no chance of

being employed at Dunlop."[149] Levy Mamabolo recollects his work conditions before the appearance of the union, "In 1979 I took a job at Bosch in Brits. We had a lot of grievances. Dismissals were a way of life. You could not see a worker for a while, then meet him on the street: `I haven't seen you, are you still on night shift?` He would answer: `I was dismissed a few weeks ago`."[150] Samuel Mthethwa, a Dunlop worker, remembers, "That white man, he could do anything to you. If he felt like hitting you, he hit you. If he felt like being nice to you, he was nice to you. In those days any white man could give you instructions. This meant you had to be in three different places at the same time and you could be dismissed for failing."[151] Finally Mandlenkosi Makhoba describes conditions in a steel mill, Rely Precision Castings, on the East Rand,

> A furnace is like a large oven powered by electricity. The heat from the mouth of the furnaces at Rely makes you weak. The white hot light is so bright that you cannot look into the furnace without a mask to protect your eyes.
>
> Your job is to hook an overhead trailer full of molten metal and pour the metal into the mould. The job is very dangerous and you are given no training at all, but just sent in with the others. A hooter blows in the factory when we are going to cast, casting is a serious business… After about two months you get the hang of the job but before that many are sacked because they recoil from the fires. It was this job I did for seven years the work of a furnacemen. But inside the Foundry they call you a cast-boy... Casting is hard work and you must work very fast, there is not time for rest... If I broke the rhythm and didn't work for two or three days, my whole body would ache...
>
> We were not given proper safety boots and overalls... There are many accidents at the furnace when we pour and when we carry pots. Very often the molten metal falls out of the pots and burns us. It can burn you from the waist down, mostly on the legs. We only have boots on and when the metal spills, it gets into your boots. There is no way you can escape the danger of burning. We could use coats, arm covering, gloves and boots, but the firm does not give them. We are two and sometimes four people carrying a pot, if someone is not experienced we will always spill. You have to pick up the pot very high to pour it into a big mould. I have been burned so many times I can't count... Other workers were badly injured and even killed by boiling metal.
>
> There is also danger if the furnace explodes. When the furnace is nearly empty and only the sand is left at the bottom it can explode. If it starts to explode it cracks. The metal will fly all over the room. You must rush to switch it off. If you are near you are going to burn.[152]

For Mawu the 1970s was a struggle for survival. That it survived at all to grow in strength and numbers in the 1980s had much to do with the hard work, tenacity and survivalist strategies in which these early unionists engaged. In 1971 a University of Natal lecturer, David Hemson, together with activist white students from the National Union of South African Students (Wages Commission) and various registered unions in Tucsa, established the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) in Durban. It administered death benefits for workers and provided a forum for them to discuss factory problems. In this way white intellectuals started to make regular contact with African workers. The explosion of strikes in 1973 led to an influx of members into the Benefit Fund, including into the Pietermaritzburg branch, where workers began to link up with

Durban membership. Pietermaritzburg members, who had a number of African Sactu organisers in their ranks, were soon demanding the launch of a metal union that would focus exclusively on their problems. Thus in April 1973, Mawu was formed and consisted of 200 workers from two factories, Alcon and Scottish Cables. Mawu was the first of the new non-racial, national industrial unions to be launched in South Africa and was comprised of two branches in Pietermaritzburg and Durban.[153]

The 1973 strikes were spontaneous, but the careful, strategic thinking and arduous work of these activists and intellectuals, was not. Fierce debate went into the formation of unions like Mawu, and what emerged were principles and strategies that would underpin these organisations in the future. The Natal-based trade unionists had developed a strategic vision which had been sharpened by contact with coloured industrial unions in the Western and Eastern Cape. At the centre of their strategy was the perception that only an accumulation of worker power would enable meaningful change. Their experience of a racially divided South Africa, and their socialist sympathies, led them to a long-term vision of a united working class in a democratic South Africa. Non-racialism meant that the unions were open to all workers regardless of colour but in practice Africans constituted the mass membership although officials were composed of Africans, whites and Indians.[154] Central to their vision was the formation of industrial unions where a strong worker unity and identity would be forged. Workers in the metal industry would initially identify with the concentration of worker power in their factories, and then through the development of a working class consciousness, would progress to identify with metal workers across their industry. From here, metal workers could be united through a trade union federation and flex their power in tandem with workers from other sectors of the economy and, indeed, other parts of the globe. This approach was reinforced by observing the rise of local general unions, outside of their ranks, in the early 1970s. Such general unions provided a different model of trade unionism. Their focus was on a generalised worker solidarity and political identification, and not on the slow construction of power within industrial sectors. The Natal unionists observed that these general unions had difficulty in mobilising workers beyond their local communities thus excluding the possibility of building worker solidarity, and national power, in a sector of the economy with which workers identified. The South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu), for example, which also organised metalworkers, engaged in an overtly political unionism and organised through large meetings, and rallies, with little emphasis on focussed factory organisation. In this mass mobilisation, however, lay the seeds of its demise. Lacking any depth of organisation in the factories, the state moved to ban the union leadership and Saawu was badly weakened.[155]

As a first step Mawu established an organisational presence in a factory and recruited membership. It then developed an accountable leadership who ultimately became the shopstewards committee. In reaction to Tucsa's bureaucratic unionism, workers' control underpinned these unionists'

approach to factory organisation. As Mawu, and later Numsa, organiser, Bernie Fanaroff recalls,

> Everything was workers' control. That was the basis of the whole thing. Everything had to be discussed at a general meeting. The shopstewards would not take decisions without going back to a general meeting. We pushed hard that shopstewards must discuss things with their own department at lunchtime and then they must meet as a shopstewards committee in the factory...This made workers feel that they owned the union which was another thing we insisted on - organisers don't own the union, workers own the union. And the result was that workers didn't feel that gap between organisers and members and demand things from the organisers. If they couldn't win things, they saw it as their problem.[156]

The shopstewards committee chose representatives to sit on a Branch Executive Committee (BEC) together with shopstewards from other factories. In turn the BEC elected representatives to the National Executive Council (NEC) which consisted of factory leaders. National officials employed by the union or elected by workers attended these meetings in a non-voting capacity. Careful mandating and report-backs at all levels ensured regular communication and accountability between general membership and union officials.

In the same year that Mawu was formed, the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Committee (Tuacc) emerged from the GFWBF. In 1974 they were joined by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Transport and General Workers Union when they united under the banner of Tuacc. The latter was committed to building non-racial industrial unions based on strong, democratic factory floor organisation through shop steward representation. It was mandated to co-ordinate the activities, finances, and administration of the four unions, and to formulate policies that would reflect their structures and practices. It also provided for the sharing of resources including that of education. It was to be an important precursor and model in the formation of the later Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) and operated until its founding in 1979.[157]

The role of white intellectuals was contentious. Lowry for example recalls the `overwhelming presence of white intellectuals` in Tuacc and the Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand's (CIWW -a Transvaal co-ordinating structure) delegations.[158] Nevertheless they played an important role in the early days where they shared their skills, knowledge, information and resources which the apartheid regime had bequeathed them but had denied their fellow black unionists. Some became trade unionists and others offered skills in areas of law, administration, the economy, politics, and financial matters, often on a voluntary basis. In addition they played an educative role within Tuacc recognising that workers' education was critical to the emerging[159] unions' strategy of building shopsteward leadership in the factories.[160] Buhlungu has pointed out however that the white intellectuals are often solely credited with the creation of a democratic tradition within these unions whereas he believes it was a product of a dynamic interaction between the lived experiences of black workers, and the contribution of community, party (SACP,

ANC, Sactu), grassroots and university educated intellectuals.[161]

At the broadest political level both the black Sactu activists and white intellectuals were committed to establishing a non-racial, democratic South Africa. Many of the white intellectuals, however, arrived at this position from a different angle, "We had a totally different tradition: we didn't mind using any structures provided we could maintain our independence. Workers' independence was everything that Western Marxism taught us."[162] commented Mike Morris a white intellectual and union activist in the seventies. White intellectuals tended to subscribe to a European tradition of union organisation and socialist politics rather than to the South African tradition of national liberation, and anti-apartheid politics associated with the ANC and Sactu. They were well-informed on South African labour history but were too young to have been part of it, and this, combined with their politics, influenced them to come to questions of liberation with an independent approach to strategy and tactics. The European Marxist and socialist ideologies they embraced[163] taught them that raising workers' consciousness was the route to changing power relations in the society and their strong tactical sense led them to appreciate that in order to build worker power for socialism, it was necessary to offer workers real benefits. Organising workers into trade unions was an ideal vehicle for this. They aimed to improve workers` wages and conditions but they also aimed to fundamentally change the South African political system.[164]

Such politics was contested however and in this was born the seeds of the `populist\workerist` debate. According to Mawu organiser Moses Mayeksio,

> The term (socialism) was around from early in Mawu's activities. It was difficult at the time to propagate socialist ideas but leadership in workshops used to discuss the issue linked to trade union organising strategy, and that socialism will be successful if it is centred around organised workers. This was in the 1970s. There were discussions from the beginning. That's what divided the leadership into so-called `workerists` and `populists` camps. They were based on interpretations of the final goal.[165]

The dominant Marxist politics, or workerist tendency, repudiated the national democratic struggle as expressed by the ANC in favour of a democratic socialist resolution. The `populist` grouping favoured links with the national liberation movement whose primary aim was to destroy the apartheid state. At times political differences were acerbic but the state strengthened the hand of the `workerist` group through the banning of two Mawu `populist` organisers, Sipho Khubeka and Gavin Anderson in 1976. Yet despite such differences, much agreement existed on the tactics to be employed in the unionisation process. As IAS (Industrial Aid Society) activist and early Mawu organiser, Khubeka recalls,

> You had two groups who did not see eye to eye politically. There were the students and lecturers who felt sidelined by Nationalist politics, on the one hand, and some white students and lecturers and intellectuals who were supportive of the ANC or Sactu, on the other. Yet they had a common purpose... I must say the comrades did a lot of good work under the circumstances. By drawing a line between labour and politics, for a period the state did not closely watch and interfere with those people... The state saw the ANC as the

> main enemy. That period gave comrades time to build very strong structures which were later instrumental in creating the period which we have today.[166]

Mawu's development in the 1970s was characterised by a process of growth and collapse in all its factories. In the absence of the right to bargain with management it struggled to offer benefits to its members in the form of improved working conditions or wages. Following the 1973 mass strikes Mawu's membership grew rapidly in Natal until by June 1974 it possessed a signed-up membership of 3 883 workers in at least 68 factories Membership however dwindled and unionists came to understand that high membership numbers were not a substitute for strong factory organisation. Mawu had moved from factory to factory without consolidating in any of them. Employers too had recovered from the shock of the 1973 strikes and were actively promoting liaison committees. Coupled with these structural weaknesses went the banning of a number of trade unionists in 1974 (including Mawu's Pietermaritzburg organiser Jeanette Cunningham-Brown). In consequence a new organisational strategy was advanced and was gradually implemented. It involved the consolidation of organisation in a limited number of factories. Shopstewards would be allocated a central role and would be directly accountable to members. They would organise workers in their departments and represent them to management. They would also represent members on Mawu's Branch Executive Committee (BEC). Furthermore the opening of local union offices would facilitate greater participation of members in union affairs.[167]

In the Transvaal, in Johannesburg, another struggle for union rebirth was taking place but unlike Natal there was no wave of strikes to assist with the recruitment of workers. Organisers from the IAS, holding similar aims to the GFWBF, were slowly recruiting and building worker communities in factories. Like the GFWBF, the IAS was founded by a combination of African Sactu activists and white intellectuals, mainly university lecturers and Nusas students who had been isolated politically by the BC movement but were keen to make a political contribution. From early on they made the tactical decision to recruit workers in the metal and engineering sectors owing to their centrality in the South African economy.[168]

Worker members of the IAS attended classes run by University of the Witwatersrand lecturers on Saturdays and they explored the experiences of the ICU in the 1920s, and of Sactu in the 1950s.[169] They evaluated the ICU and its effectiveness and failings, and through discussion drew lessons for the current labour movement. To these university intellectuals, the failure of the ICU was organisational. It failed to win recognised trade union status for Africans as it spread itself too thinly across sectors in a general union model; it placed excessive emphasis on unaccountable leadership; and it failed to organise members into strong independent worker structures which could withstand government repression. The lessons for workers in the seventies was that they needed to organise themselves into tight industrial trade unions which through worker power

would force the status quo to recognise African unions. Sactu's approach differed from the ICU's in that it was a meeting point for factory-based unions. For white intellectuals in the independent trade unions of the 1970s, however, Sactu's decline was a stinging lesson in organisational politics. It was unstrategic in that it delayed organising the most powerful sectors of the economy such as engineering and mining and it was unable to impose a working class direction on the Congress Alliance and thus lost its independence. The main message however was the danger of linking factory-based economic struggles with broader political struggles. Sactu had been destroyed by the state as a result of its intimate association with the ANC and the participation of many of its members in Inkhonto we Sizwe. The lesson that the leadership drew from Sactu's experience was that unions must avoid overt links with the exiled nationalist movements and that political independence was the key to survival.[170] The failure of Sactu and the repression of the 1960s had left fearful workers and the memory of state violence had led to a quiescent workforce in this decade. A survey conducted by Eddie Webster in 1973-76[171] on workers' reasons for not joining the new unions revealed fears of dismissal if employers discovered union membership, and fear of police action because the state would associate union membership with the ANC. In consequence union organisers of the 1970s were at pains to adopt a low organising profile. Murphy emphasises however, that this did not mean emulating the Tucsa unions,

> We rejected Tucsa's way of operating. We went to a factory and talked to people and found out what their problems were and then we'd get a meeting together and plug straight away into informal factory leadership. With Tucsa this basic stuff was absent. Tucsa was a bureaucracy because it had a faith in the law, a financial base in terms of the law, a subscription system, which kept the office functioning and you play a game with management - you scratch their back, they scratch yours and nothing changes much. For us it was the opposite to this way of working.[172]

The form trade union organisation should take was sharply debated by these union activists and the question of industrial or general unions was pivotal. It was not a debate that penetrated into worker structures, but it was nevertheless crucial for the future of the trade union movement. In Natal both intellectuals and workers in Tuacc, had opted early on for industrial unions and Alpheus Mthethwa, Mawu's first Natal branch secretary, travelled to Johannesburg to persuade the metal wing of the IAS to join the union. Problems and victimisation at British Leyland in Natal had led them to believe that the only solution was to organise Leyland workers throughout South Africa. But he met a raging debate on whether to form industrial or general unions. Kubheka recalls,

> The discussion was that we have seen general unions in the past, the ICU and it was not very effective because it did not organise strongly on the ground, it did not have a focus on a particular sector... it did not go for a particular strategic industry in the economy. Some people also argued that general unions tend to be more political, and this was dangerous because they do not focus on the building of grass-roots structures, and it was dangerous to be too political at that time.
>
> Then the other argument was that industrial unions are divisive. Why not have one general union divided into different sectors, so that you have one line of march in the same kind of union? It would also be easier in terms of resources. You may have a very

> weak union with vulnerable workers by virtue of their sector, for instance the construction industry where the industry is not based in one place. Then we have a metal industry which is situated in one place where there are many workers. Then the resources could be easily shared if we have one union, one policy, similar principles, and you can distribute resources more evenly than having this one union organising on its own having problems. These were all very forceful arguments. [173]

Although unsure of what strategy to adopt, the IAS nevertheless developed a close relationship with Tuacc. Thus when metal workers asked for assistance in forming a union the IAS requested Mawu's assistance and agreement was reached to form a Transvaal branch of Mawu in 1975. The industrial union argument had won the day. In 1976 the CIWW, a co-ordinating body similar to Tuacc, was formed by the IAS and the Transvaal branch of Mawu. It also aimed to facilitate the extension of other Tuacc unions into the province. In 1978 agreement was reached that the CIWW unions should formally join Tuacc.[174] A national federation was in the making.

Although Mawu experienced some revival after 1974, by December 1976 it was again on the point of collapse as membership continued to decline and by 1977 all organised workplaces had folded. Recalcitrant companies refused union recognition and union bankruptcy was imminent as it was unable to negotiate stop order facilities and dues from hand collections were often pocketed by impoverished organisers. Added to this was the banning in 1976 of four Mawu officials and a crushing defeat at one of its strongest Transvaal (Elandsfontein) factories, Heinemann, where workers were savagely attacked by police. The new leadership returned to the drawing board to commence a period of reconstruction. The new strategy was a stronger restatement of the Durban 1974 model and an extension of this strategy. It aimed to decentralise the union, to become less office bound and to consolidate limited membership in a few factories. Organisers would refocus on the building of shopsteward leadership and strong self-sustaining factory structures, including an educational thrust, together with a focus on the strengthening of the BEC. A new sustained focus was to be on winning union recognition agreements from management in a few companies. Fanaroff recalls the emphasis on attaining such agreements, "…because the law didn't provide for a recognition you had to get a written agreement which would at least have the force of a civil contract so there was a way of entrenching rights you had won. That became a strategy to get membership and then get management to talk to you, (50 +1) [managements demanded that over 50 per cent of workers be union members] and then to get rights that could be written down despite the fact that black unions couldn't be recognised.**"[175]**

This strategy included a take over of works and liaison committees which would provide access to workers and space in which to organise.[176] Tuacc unions had previously spurned this strategy which a rival union initiative, the Urban Training Project (UTP),[177] had advocated as a means of gaining recognition. According to Lowry, this strategy now embraced by Mawu, had ironically been one of the reasons for Tuacc's repudiation of UTP in the early 1970s.[178] Furthermore Mawu

confronted with numerous small plants took the decision to target bigger companies employing large numbers which were least likely to resist unionism. Such companies were often foreign subsidiaries which allowed Mawu to employ international leverage and the EEC and Sullivan Codes[179] to force recognition.[180] The union conducted a recognition drive in foreign-owned companies such as British Glacier Bearings in Pinetown, and Craft Industries in the Transvaal. Mawu Pietermaritzburg organiser, Geoff Schreiner, recalls, "There was a strong emphasis on multi-nationals. The three companies in Pietermaritzburg that we targeted were Scottish Cables, a UK company, Sarmcol, and Huletts Aluminium. The thinking was to forge linkages with other workers in those multinationals and use their strength to secure recognition here."[181] In the Transvaal Mawu decided to organise Anglo American companies in response to the conglomerate's attempts to promote a reformist image. The union also made the strategic decision to target specific sectors within metal engineering. Here Fanaroff explains the reasoning,

> The idea of targeting strategic sectors in the industry, targeting steel, and trying to be a force there. We targeted factories that we thought would be easier like the Barlow factories, and the steel and electrical sector. I had these theories about monopolising specific industrial sectors for real power. The theory was that every time you spoke about money, employers told you about their competitors, so we said we must organise their competitors. We selected the domestic appliance industry and the steel industry where we thought we could get a major part of the competition organised. We avoided the little factories but of course they came in.[182]

Even Lowry who records Tuacc's arrogant treatment of UTP concedes that, "The intellectuals (Tuacc's) concentrated their resources in areas where more bargaining power was to be had, the commanding heights of the industry. UTP, on the other hand, often left the choice to the workers themselves …The lame and the halt, whose need was greater, were not always the best prospect for militant unionism."[183]

This painstaking process began to show results and by 1979 Mawu had consolidated its presence in a number of factories in both branches. The union was on the point of winning recognition at Tensile Rubber in the Transvaal, and had gained informal recognition at a further 11 factories where grievance and disciplinary procedures were in place. Intensive organisation was also underway at another seven factories. By the end of 1979 Mawu had membership in Durban and Pinetown, Pietermaritzburg, in Kew and Wynberg to the north east of Johannesburg, in Pretoria, on the East Rand in industrial centres such as Springs, Benoni, Boksburg, Germiston, Elandsfontein, and on the West Rand in Roodepoort. The BECs too, were beginning to function effectively with, in the Transvaal for example, regular attendance by 11 factories and the training of all delegates on roles and procedures. African worker leadership was now in evidence at all levels of the union with the consequence that the influence of white intellectuals was beginning to wane.[184]

5. Disaffected Tucsa unions: Numarwosa, Uaw, WPMawu, Eawu

Mawu was not alone in organising metal workers in the 1970s. A number of other unions which existed in the metal sector were to have a significant impact on the build up of worker power in the 1980s. These unions were rooted in a different tradition of unionism from Mawu, emerging from the conservative, registered unions in the metal industry affiliated to Tucsa. Three of these unions, Numarwosa (National Union of Motor Assembly & Rubber Workers of South Africa)[185], its parallel African union UAW (United Automobile Workers), and WPMawu (Western Province Motor Assemblers Workers Union) were established in the Eastern and Western Cape in the 1960s and early 1970s to organise motor assembly workers. They moved into large auto factories, and unlike Mawu were not confronted with the difficulty of organising hundreds of small engineering outfits.

The auto industry had long been central to the Eastern Cape economy and had developed in distinct phases. The first phase commenced in 1924 and entailed the assembly of auto parts for sales outside of South Africa. After the Second World War, in the 1950s, European, and to a lesser extent North American (and in the 1960s Japanese) producers expanded to new assembly sites in the third world including South Africa in an attempt to escape high-labour cost areas. Vehicle sales grew rapidly and in a booming market both Ford and General Motors (GM) launched major expansion programmes. Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage grew with them. Other competitors, unlike GM and Ford, encouraged locally licensed dealers to start assembly operations.[186] The growth of auto assembly plants encouraged the expansion of the components industry. This was initially limited to low value added items which were often produced outside the manufacturing centres of Europe and the USA such as tyres, glass, upholstery, tubes, paint, and hang-on components. Only 18 per cent of materials needed by the industry however were locally produced. State policy-makers saw in the industry the beginnings of a broader industrialization strategy and began to promote a local contents programme. This led to the rapid expansion of the industry in the 1960s as a number of new producers established assembly plants. Some companies extended their operations by adding press shop operations to supply body panels and other metal parts, whilst others began to manufacture engines. A range of component suppliers grew up alongside these assembly factories. Investment rose from about R15 million in 1961, the year before the local content programme was introduced, to an estimated R100 million ten years later.[187] In Uitenhage, six new components firms opened and in Port Elizabeth expansion of existing component suppliers grew apace.[188] Sales of passenger cars rose from 75,938 in 1961 to 229,031 by 1975.[189]

The growth and development of the sector resulted in a significant rise in employment in the area. The industry was characterised by the automated assembly line, introduced in three auto companies after 1948, which gave employers direct control over the pace of work. Wages were

relatively high compared to other sectors of employment. Assembly lines were placed under the supervision of foremen who had the power to grant wage increases and to discipline workers. White workers initially staffed the industry but over time were replaced by coloured workers as the former moved into more skilled employment. The 1960s marked a new phase in labour relations in the industry. At the start of the 1960s boom no unions were recognized but this would change over the decade. White workers were the first to organize and gain recognition for their union, Yster en Staal. In 1968 an Industrial Council for the Eastern Cape Auto Industry was established. The Eastern and Western Cape had been zoned by the government as Coloured Preferential Areas in legislation enacted in 1965 which aimed at keeping Africans out of these areas by reserving less skilled jobs for coloured workers. To enforce this ruling the government froze all housing development in Cape Town's African townships. When it finally allowed Africans to buy houses in the 1980s on 99 year lease, the Western Cape still remained excluded from this concession. Africans were unable to work legally unless the Department of Labour certified that no coloured worker could do the job. As a consequence coloured workers were far more numerous than Africans in the auto assembly sector, although later, after 1985, as influx control laws fell away many more African workers entered the labour force. In the Transvaal however, where this law did not apply, African workers dominated the workforce.[190]

The first significant independent African unions to emerge in the Eastern Cape in the 1970s were in the auto sector. This was largely due to the manufacturing sector being an important source of employment for Africans in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, and to the predominance of the auto industry in manufacturing in the region. The proportion of Africans in manufacturing increased from 23.9 per cent of the total workforce in 1979 to 29,5 per cent in 1980 in Port Elizabeth, and in Uitenhage from 38,7 per cent to 48,8 per cent over the same period. In 1979 the auto sector accounted for 30,2 per cent of all employment and 22,6 per cent of African employment in the manufacturing sector in the Eastern Cape. In addition component suppliers were emerging as significant employers in their own right. The rubber sector in itself employed 10,2 per cent of Africans. The auto industry, however, still employed more coloureds and whites by 1979 than it did Africans. The total employment in auto in 1979 was 21 009 of which whites constituted 35,6 per cent, coloureds 34,9 per cent and Africans 22,6 per cent.[191]

Semi-skilled coloured workers were central to production. They were covered by the Industrial Conciliation Act that under the amendments of 1956 allowed for the formation of racially exclusive registered coloured unions which sat on the Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry.[192] Before 1967 none of the coloured workers in major auto or tyre companies were organised. In 1967 Edgar Deane was sent by Tucsa to form a union in the auto industry under the auspices of the International Metal Federation (IMF) who funded an organiser. Deane met with

coloured workers from General Motors (GM), Ford and Rover who raised discrimination in wages, promotion, and working conditions as their most important issues. From these initiatives grew Numarwosa, which was launched in 1967. Initially it recruited few members but by 1979 it boasted a 4 500 coloured membership.[193] Thereafter the Numarwosa organizing committee were left on their own. As Fred Sauls, a Ford worker at the time, related, "Edgar Deane was from Cape Town. So after the meeting they moved back to Cape Town and we were stranded here and the guys from Cape Town didn't come forward with any organising strategy. The only thing is, `Look you've got to recruit the guys, you've got to tell how good the union is going to be'. But how to develop a strategy? How to speak to guys? We just had to develop that ourselves."[194]

In the early stages, Numarwosa did not have policies on the development of worker controlled factory structures in order to promote internal union democracy. When members had a grievance, they looked outside the factory in Tucsa fashion to officials in the union office. "We were in a Tucsa frame of mind. But the loose committee structure in the plants slowly developed into something like a shopsteward system." commented Sauls.[195] The union conducted little membership education and when factory committee members attended industrial council meetings they were often at sea. Sauls recalls,

> We ended up in the IC without knowing the damn what we were doing there! Nobody had explained to us in the plant what the IC was all about, how it functions... So we ended up in the Council listening to what is happening, and afterwards we found out the agreement is being concluded. We go back to the workers, the workers ask, `What's happening?`. We say we don't know… I phoned the branch secretary and I said, `Look this is not the way things should operate.` We started to question the things about accountability, what are the organisers doing? How are they accountable to the worker reps in the plant?[196]

At Ford, coloured union members developed the strategy of singling out senior long service workers who could stand up to the foreman. Over time every department at Ford had one or two workers helping the organising committee. When they had a substantial majority of members on the factory floor they revealed themselves to management. After its launch the union took less than a year to sign up more than 50 per cent of Ford workers and by 1968 they had recruited enough members to press management for recognition. In the process of organising, coloured workers began to demand accountable organisers and organic worker structures developed. Questions of accountability, for example, led Ford workers to force organisers to fill in a daily sheet accounting for their whereabouts.[197]

From its base at Ford, GM and Rover, Numarwosa extended organisation in 1968 to Volkswagen workers in Uitenhage and in 1970 the union set up a national executive committee and joined Tucsa. Three years after its launch, Numarwosa had won a majority of coloured workers in the auto industry outside of the Western Cape. Its heart was the motor assembly factories in Port Elizabeth, but branches were soon established in Durban and East London. Sauls was elected to

branch secretary in 1971 precipitating an internal contestation for control of the union. Former branch executive members had been opposed to building union power through the recruitment of Africans into its ranks, nor were they interested in developing factory based leadership. Sauls' style however, was both inclusive and tactical and he was eager to begin the recruitment of African workers. During the 1960s office bearers were elected in poorly attended general meetings in a venue removed from factories. Now office bearers and shopstewards were elected on the factory floor and consisted of one shopsteward to every 250 members. In 1979 the union could assert that,

> Where we had no leadership in the companies in 1967, we now have hundreds of committee members, branch chairman, vice-chairman, shop stewards, and shop committee members. Where we were inexperienced in 1967, the Union has developed an efficient and up to date team of Secretariat, to back up any demand or request of our committees and shop floor leadership. .. today our union is formally established in every major Automobile & Tyre company. Workers in the Battery, Car carpet and component industry are also members of our union… You belong in a union that has brought the minimum wage in the Auto industry from 15 cents to R1 per hour. ..The union is financed by members paying 60 cents per week. Of this 30 cents is put aside for sick, death, distress and retirement benefits. The other 30 cents is used for all the services of the union, including administration of the benefits.[198]

The union's constitution forbade shopstewards from meeting alone with management and they were expected to report-back to members on any discussions with the company. Over time shopstewards became the stronghold of the union in the factory and, as with Mawu, served as a leadership core for the union as a whole.[199]

Initially Numarwosa wanted to organise Africans out of a general political concern for the impoverished situation of African workers. It believed racial divisions reduced worker power. Other issues were also involved however and the union's weakness on the industrial council was one of these,

> At this point, we had representation on the Industrial Council although it was not effective. We realised that just having coloureds there to represent coloured interests is not going to effectively challenge management. So, we developed links with African workers in the plants... On the Industrial Council management saw two groups of black workers - the coloureds represented by the National Union on the one side, and the Africans represented by the Bantu Labour Office on the other. We did not feel satisfied just speaking for the Africans with them having no voice. But moreover to improve the conditions of workers, we needed a unified structure. Thus we worked for a united front and this led to the establishment of UAW in 1973. From then on we had close co-operation sharing of resources, organisers and offices. Whenever we went to the Industrial Council there was also full discussion on all issues to be raised.[200]

Numarwosa took its first policy decision to approach Africans in late 1972 whilst it was still in Tucsa. In order to circumvent legal problems over admitting African members, the union employed the tactical device of forming the United Automobile Workers (UAW) as a parallel union to Numarwosa. The long term aim was to merge the two organisations into one auto union. This approach differed significantly from the typical Tucsa African parallel union where leaders

were appointed by the all white union executive and African leadership was neither developed nor encouraged. UAW's membership elected its leaders to an independent executive and it sat with Numarwosa representatives on a joint Advisory Committee.[201] It should be mentioned here, as it is not often acknowledged in the literature, that the UTP played an important role in UAW's early formation. Numarwosa and UTP assisted in the launch of UAW and in 1975 UTP helped to establish a Pretoria branch and found and trained an organiser, Dorah Nowatha. A UTP organiser, Michael Faya became UAW's first national secretary in 1974 and was initially paid by the organisation.[202] The UTP also conducted a number of seminars and courses for UAW shopstewards in 1975 on labour laws and basic trade union organisation.[203]

The UAW struggled hard to survive in its first years and organising Africans was clandestine and slow. Workers proved fearful and difficult to recruit and the union's resources were negligible. Yet beneath workers' cautious facade lay longstanding grievances in particular around racial discrimination, and unfair dismissal. Foremen in the 1970s had wide powers ranging from granting leave to use toilets, to arbitrary decisions on wage increases, retrenchments and dismissals. An IR director from General Motors joked, "The biggest optimist in the workforce was the guy who brought his sandwiches to work, because he had no assurance that he'd still be there at lunch time."[204] Formal procedures for Africans to lodge complaints or appeals were unheard of.[205]

In some factories, such as Volkswagen (VW), former ANC, PAC and Sactu political activists working at the company, played a crucial organising role. Vuyo Kwinana and Themba Dyassi, for example, were part of an ANC underground cell and both had served prison sentences for belonging to an illegal organisation. Elijah `Scoma` Antonie was not an ANC member but had attended ANC and Sactu lectures, whilst Albert Gomomo was a PAC member who recruited his younger brother, John Gomomo, who had no political affiliation into the union. The union's recruitment drive in Uitenhage constituted an important venture into non-racial organising and shopfloor control as these former activists, assisted by Numarwosa's coloured unionists, created secret organising cells across departments. Scoma and Papa Williams, Numarwosa's president and a strong advocate of African membership, for example, knew each other from rugby matches, and worked in the same department. These activists developed a similar position to Mawu on political independence. Recalls Scoma, "If the ANC is banned, it stands to reason Sactu is also going to be banned. Now in order to avoid that, we did not want to align ourselves with ANC directly. We wanted to be an independent body."[206] Such independence had the added advantage of attracting activists from different political groupings as well as non-political workers.

Coloured and African activists, probably influenced by UTP, employed the tactic of taking over liaison committees as a first step towards developing the union. Unlike the Tuacc unions

Numarwosa had no political objection to using these statutory bodies and instead of attempting to destroy them would bring them under its control. Often elected liaison committee members were drawn from a clandestine factory BEC.[207] Targeting the liaison committee proved an effective strategy as it was less threatening to management and to ordinary workers than a union. From 1973 onwards Numarwosa shopstewards and liaison committee members began to meet regularly to ensure that the committee did not undermine anything that Numarwosa was negotiating for coloured workers on the regional industrial council.[208]

At VW, for example, union activists successfully used the liaison committee to organise Africans into UAW and to win company recognition. John Gomomo and Scoma who appeared more politically neutral than other African activists played a large role on the liaison committee. The close co-operation between coloured Numarwosa leaders and African factory activists made it easier to present the idea of the parallel UAW to the company. This peculiarly powerful unity of coloured and African leaders was not replicated however in other auto factories where a stricter division of racial categories was adhered to. At Ford, for example, coloureds were employed at the Neave plant and African workers at the Cortina and Struandale plants.[209] In the components sector the liaison committee strategy was also utilised. Daniel Dube, a Uitenhage SKF Bearings' worker and later Numsa president, remembers the components sector being organised in the mid 1970s. John Mke, UAW's president and Numarwosa's Fred Sauls joined forces to organise and gain recognition at SKF, a Swedish subsidiary, in 1976. They met resistance. They then recruited liaison committee members and after winning their support utilised them as recruiters for the union. The union had a funeral benefit scheme and it employed this scheme, in agreement with members, to effect stop order deductions. Supported by a Swedish trade union who put pressure on the parent company, they succeeded in winning recognition in May 1977. Dube remembers this as a significant breakthrough as SKF shopstewards such as Edwin Maepe and himself began rapidly to recruit members in other Uitenhage component factories such as Dorbyl, Borg-Warner, Bosal and National Standard. Thereafter similar recruitment in Port Elizabeth began to unfold as workers joined the union from such companies as Willard Batteries, Autoplastics, and Dorbyl. Uitenhage shopstewards also assisted other emerging unions in the area to recruit such as the National Union of Textile Workers and the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.[210]

UAW grew rapidly and by the end of 1979 the union had significant membership at six factories in Port Elizabeth and had won recognition at VW, SKF, Ford and General Motors, including the concomitant financial benefits of company stop-order deductions. It had also expanded to become the first genuinely national union in the new union movement incorporating branches in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Durban and East London, as well as gaining some presence in large plants in Pretoria from 1976 onwards.[211] One of Numarwosa/UAW's critical contributions was the building

of strong black leadership for the new trade union movement. Much of this factory leadership was developed in the process of day to day struggle including dealing directly with management around grievances and towards the end of the 1970s, in handling militant industrial action. Sauls recalled the impact of unionisation in the Eastern Cape by early 1980,

> They [trade unions} have had a tremendous impact on the area. Companies are multinationals ... but I can say their attitudes have definitely changed... What is important to me is that people around Uitenhage and PE (Port Elizabeth) have really been made aware of the role of trade unionism...during the strike at VW, the church people, without our approaching them, have sent circulars to some of the churches telling them that they must address themselves to the conditions under which their congregations are living and working... First it was the Eveready strike, then it was Ford, now it's the strike at VW [Volkswagen in 1980]. Since then a lot of people are sitting up...
>
> We've at least reached the stage where the balance of power across the negotiating table is more or less equal: we don't have to beg or plead anymore... it's not just a question of sending two people to speak on their behalf. They [workers] realise where the power is: it's not across the negotiating table. The power is in the capital of management and in the labour power of workers on the floor.[212]

The 1978 strike at Eveready, a British battery manufacturing company, to which Sauls refers, was the first legal strike in South Africa for 20 years. It represented an important test case. Numarwosa's 320 members, most of them coloured women, struck to demand recognition. Gloria Barry, a former Eveready worker and vice-president of Numarwosa, recalls that, "The conditions that these women worked under in Eveready were very bad. In fact, it was so bad that once the production lines started, they couldn't leave to go to the toilet! There were boxes put down and they had to relieve themselves on the line."[213] In the first week of the strike the company called in the police. Due to high unemployment in Port Elizabeth, scab labour was readily available. The company dismissed all the strikers who continued their strike for a further six months without success and suffered for years from a blacklist of names held by local companies.[214]

The defeat of these workers made a strong impression on the emerging unions. It hardened their attitude to the official bargaining system, demonstrating as it did that a strike's legality did not protect workers from dismissal or police action and that union registration did not guarantee bargaining rights.[215] It also revealed the limits to the strategy of organising foreign owned companies. One useful consequence of the strike though, was the strengthening of ties between Numarwosa and Tuacc. Tuacc's Alec Erwin visited Port Elizabeth during the dispute and was impressed by the way the strike was organised, "They lost but that had nothing to do with the way they organised it. The strike convinced me we had a lot to learn from them."[216]

A series of strikes at Ford in 1979, also mentioned by Sauls, provided some salutary lessons which forced the union to look at the limits of its political independence. The first strike at Ford began in October 1979 at the Cortina Struandale Plant when Thozamile Botha, a trainee draughtsman and

leader of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco), resigned from Ford on the grounds that the company was putting pressure on him because of his political activity. Workers distributed pamphlets saying, "If he [Botha] is not here at noon today, tools down everybody."[217] At the time of the strike Port Elizabeth was emerging as a centre of African resistance to apartheid and Botha was addressing rallies of 10 000 people. Ford Cortina workers began wearing Pebco badges on the assembly line which was a bold move at a time when politics on the factory floor was rare.[218] At noon, 700 African workers gathered on the company's lawns and waited for Botha to address them. Ford's personnel officer urged workers to return to work and requested that UAW's John Mke translate into Xhosa. Workers heard their union president talking management's language. Mke's days as a worker leader were over.[219] The irony was that UAW supported the workers' demands. Sauls expressed his concern that Botha had to choose between his job and community activities.[220] After the strike ended, and Botha was reinstated, it was UAW that negotiated full pay for the striking workers for their two and half days on strike. Leadership were angered at Pebco's accusations that it had sold out the workers. Sauls retorted, "Management was not going to fire him, so he had to resign for the workers to push him to come back... it was clear to us: Pebco used this to show their control over workers. And they succeeded. They could get all the workers out and keep them out for three days... It was then clear that Botha was not pursuing the interests of the workers. He did not ask the question about the lost pay."[221] Botha in his turn claimed that UAW ignored Pebco's request for help on the grounds that the strike was political.[222] In a press statement Numarwosa organiser George Manase stated that, "We are fighting for the liberation of the black people. The politicians have interfered a bit too much in this matter. We should operate on our area - trade unions - and politicians in theirs. We must work on parallel lines. These militant radicals interfere with us."[223] It was a view held by other BEC members. Sauls believed that it was difficult to separate political and trade union issues but reasserted the necessity for union independence from political affiliations. This stand-off position was held by UAW's leadership, but on the factory floor political unionism was readily embraced by African membership. In Numarwosa members of the Cape based Unity Movement existed but Sauls and other organisers were not party people. The leadership of UAW and Numarwosa were not a- political however. They rejected racial divisions amongst workers and focussed on building workers' awareness of themselves as human beings who could shed exploitation and overcome a sense of inferiority to the `white man`.[224] In the mid 1970s when they linked up with unions elsewhere they began to develop education programmes which viewed workers as an oppressed class. This concern not to mix party politics and shopfloor issues and to guard union independence was however to draw Mawu and Numarwosa leadership closer in the seventies.

The strike precipitated a spate of industrial conflict at Ford over the next three months in which UAW negotiated on workers' behalf. Finally after calling in the police, the company, dismissed

700 strikers. The union demanded reinstatement without loss of status. At this point a power struggle developed between UAW and Pebco and a group of dismissed workers elected an independent Pebco committee (later the Ford Workers Committee) to negotiate with Ford. Eventually the US government, embarrassed by the dispute in its South African company, intervened, and the Ford agreed to reinstate workers.[225] It was a victory for Ford workers and strike leaders had gained huge confidence in confronting and negotiating with management. For the union the dispute had however raised uncomfortable questions. It was becoming clear that it was out of touch with workers' level of militancy. Soon after the dismissals UAW told workers that Ford was prepared take back some of the workers but workers rejected this offer and compared union officials to sell-out community councillors. The dispute between UAW and the Ford Committee was never resolved and a few months later, the Committee formed a new union, the Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa (Macwusa) committed to fighting for rights in the townships as well as in the factories. Over time Macwusa recruited members in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Pretoria, although it never overtook UAW and Numarwosa's membership.[226]

The Ford disputes in 1979 were an important moment. They led UAW to examine its organising strategy. It concluded that part of the problem was that organisers and factory representatives did not meet often enough with members. It had failed to construct strong factory structures which had made it easier for militant workers to view the union as a management-government puppet. UAW began work on improving communication with membership through a focus on building strong shopsteward structures and re-negotiating grievance procedures to ensure workers had a voice. The result was the signing of an unusually sophisticated agreement for the time in which Ford agreed to elected full-time shopstewards on full pay - a precedent that VW soon followed. The dispute had also demonstrated the limits of the liaison committee strategy which could not address the militant conflict between workers and management. Through contact with Mawu, and through its own experience, the union concluded that only strong democratic unions could turn workers' militancy to advantage.[227] The industrial unrest also alerted other employers to the danger of dealing with ineffective worker structures. It also signalled that workers would use their factory rights to voice wider political grievances. A few years before workers would not have reacted to a racist foreman's remarks or to a political event. Now workers were asserting that factory rights were intertwined with their broader human rights. The bargaining power that they had won through their militant solidarity had raised their confidence and their struggle was observed by other workers in the Eastern Cape and across the country.[228]

At the time that Numarwosa was breaking from the Tucsa tradition, another coloured union, the Western Province Motor Assemblers Union (WPMawu), in the Western Cape, was challenging

Tucsa leadership. The union was formed in Cape Town in 1961 by coloured workers in Austen Motors and Chrysler and soon won recognition agreements at the latter and at British Leyland. Unlike Numarwosa/UAW, it only recruited coloured membership organising as it was in a coloured labour preferential area (the union had 10 African security guard members).[229] Natie Gantana, a Leyland worker and president of WPMawu, recalled, "Over this period the union had a sad history because it had a sad executive. It was recognised by law and the company but it didn't operate in the workers' interests... The leaders were management guys - they didn't want to put up a hard fight. They were `Yes sir` guys. For example, the shop stewards were senior blokes - inspectors and charge hands and the blue overall guys never qualified to be shop stewards."[230]

It took a small group of active union members from the late 1960s to 1972 to persuade members that the only way to democratise the union was to oust the union's conservative executive. For months the new group went on regular house visits where they discussed a restructured union with workers. Gantana recalls, "There were years of `half-nag slaap en half-nag dink` [nights of half thinking and half sleeping] and often we didn't even have time to eat."[231] A persistent grievance articulated by members was that leadership routinely negotiated larger wage increases for higher grades at Leyland. When workers challenged management on this, it responded, according to former general secretary, Joe Foster, by asking, " `Why are you complaining about wages when we have been giving increases.` But these increases only went to union leadership."[232] Having convinced many members that a new leadership was necessary, the group of activists found a pretext to oust the current leadership. The national secretary of Numarwosa, Edgar Deane had just been sentenced to jail for fraud and Jack Heeger, national secretary of Tucsa's furniture union, sought to replace him. His idea was for WPMawu and Numarwosa to merge under his leadership. Thus the pretext used by the activists to oust the old leadership was to reject the merger with Numarwosa. Members held a general meeting at Elsies River and passed a motion of no confidence in the national secretary and the entire executive. They formed an interim executive committee and suspended the amalgamation on the basis that they were able to prove a forged worker ballot on the merger of Eastern and Western Cape motor unions. The old leadership fought back and requested that management fire the interim executive on the grounds that they were agitators. The new leadership now commanded the majority support of members and at an election in March 1972 the old executive was ousted. Joe Foster, a former worker in the print industry, was appointed National Secretary in 1972 (Tucsa's national secretaries were not elected) and began the process of returning the union to its membership. The executive committed the union to democratic worker control through accountable shopstewards.[233] Foster explained, "We believe very strongly in participatory democracy, in grassroots democracy. We the executive and officials could run the union efficiently like a business if we wanted to - there's nothing stopping us - but we don't think things should run that way. We believe that a future democratic South Africa should be run by the

people, that the workers should participate in the running of the country..." [234] It disaffiliated from Tucsa in 1972 and attempted to persuade Numarwosa to do the same.[235]

Numarwosa however only disaffiliated from Tucsa in 1976. Sauls remembers why it left,

> When we started looking at our relationship with UAW and the direction in which the union was going our affiliation to Tucsa and the IMF [International Metalworkers Federation] became important issues. In our discussions the question arose that if the UAW does not fit into Tucsa there must be something drastically wrong with that organisation... We had discussions with Tucsa unions at Annual Conferences to see how they viewed the bringing in of African workers into the Tucsa fold... when we had feedback from this, we were shocked - the feeling from the floor, from worker representatives was shocking... So we decided we are just wasting our time in Tucsa ... [236]

It was at this point that Sauls decided to sound out WPMawu on the question of unity. Numarwosa had previously approached WPMawu in this regard in 1970 but the initiative collapsed mainly due to mistrust between leaders. Foster recalls that in 1976 one of Sauls's attempts to unite more democratic unions involved a meeting which was convened at the US consulate in Johannesburg. Foster who had socialist leanings, viewed the attempt with suspicion. It was an initiative a little later from the IMF[237] to form a Southern African Co-ordinating Committee that was ultimately to bring the Cape unions and Mawu together. Foster recalls, "When Alec [Erwin of Mawu] came to IMF meetings and started to talk about workers` control, we realised we had an affinity."[238]

The Southern African Co-ordinating Council of the IMF also brought these unions together with another former Tucsa metal union that grew in the 1970s, the Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU). The union had been started in the mid sixties as part of Tucsa's African Affairs Committee as the Sheet Metal Workers Union and by 1966 it had 1041 members. Sactu bitterly opposed its formation viewing it as Tucsa `splitting tactics` and Sactu historians Luckhardt and Wall claimed `it never really got off the ground`. [239] It did however `get off the ground` and emerged as an independent union after it was expelled from Tucsa in 1969. It joined the UTP initiative in 1971, which Eric Tyacke, a former EAWU general secretary who was expelled from Tucsa, had helped to establish. It was the first union to receive assistance from UTP. EAWU grew in strength. By 1974 its paid up membership was 3 000, and its signed up membership 9 000 by 1976 by which time it was financially independent.[240] Later in the 1970s divisions developed in the union when differences between the Central Branch under Jane Hlongwane and the national executive surfaced. The larger group led by Calvin Nkabinde, EAWU's general secretary, had its head office in Springs, and through the IMF came into regular contact with Mawu and Numarwosa. It subsequently joined Fosatu on its formation in 1979[241] when it brought 4 000 members into the federation.[242]

In time, to anticipate matters slightly, Nkabinde conflicted with Fosatu leadership after refusing to implement Fosatu policies or to attend federation meetings, whilst simultaneously calling for the retrenchment of some of its white officials.[243] Meanwhile an EAWU organiser, Petrus Tom, was successfully organising large numbers of engineering workers into the Vaal branch in the industrial areas of Vanderbijlpark and Vereeniging in the Western Transvaal. Mawu too was beginning to organise in the area and the EAWU branch developed a respect for its accountable way of working. It accused the Springs officials of laziness. In 1981, EAWU resolved to make the Vaal branch more independent and attempted to change the constitution so that the head office would reside in the Vaal where majority membership was located. Nkabinde responded by accusing Vaal officials of theft and dismissing them. They joined Mawu taking the entire branch executive of EAWU with them.[244] According to Tom, "They [members] started organising in their factories against Engineering [EAWU]. The strongest factories I started with were Union Steel Corporation (Usco) Vaal, Usco Klip, and Consolidated Wire Industries (CWI). By July we had over 1 000 members at the two Usco's and about 500 at CWI. The workers were demanding that we organise them."[245] In February 1982 EAWU was expelled from Fosatu and the Mawu Vaal branch used their new base to win over former EAWU factories and to recruit and win recognition in a number of new workplaces such as Elektrode Maatskappy van Suid Afrika (Emsa), Thames Wire and Cables, Cape Gate, Irvine Chapman, Dorbyl, Vecor, GKN Millsteel, Apex Industry, Fedmech, Tosa, Metal Box, African Detinning, and Iscor. Mawu played a pioneering role in establishing a Fosatu Vaal shopstewards council, chaired by an experienced former East Rand worker Johannes Mosia. Fosatu's Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union shopstewards soon joined them.[246]

It was thus that former Tucsa and UTP and independent auto and metal engineering unions were drawn together in the 1970s. As will be explored in greater depth in forthcoming chapters, the former Tucsa unions brought a distinctive tradition to Numsa and would contribute significantly to its style of organisation, its bargaining choices, and to its bureaucratic efficiency.

6. In Tucsa: Motor Industry Combined Workers Union

Whilst Numarwosa/UAW, WPMawu and Mawu were drawing closer in the 1970s another union, the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (Micwu), organising in the motor sector, viewed Mawu, and to some extent Numarwosa, as competitors.

Micwu was a coloured union which in the 1970s remained firmly in the Tucsa fold. Tucsa's commitment to black trade unionism over three decades had been erratic, often instrumentalist and progressively more determined by the policies of the apartheid state. It admitted and expelled, or partially expelled, African and coloured unions from its ranks according to the political exigencies of the day. In the 1950s when it was competing with Sactu it accommodated itself to mixed race

unions. Its profile was that of a moderate non-political federation which upheld free market principles and was principally engaged in the bargaining of wages and working conditions associated with orthodox trade unionism. It supported the formation of the Federation of Free Trade Unions of SA (Fofatusa) in 1959 to organise African workers because of its anti-communist position and offered no support to Sactu in the early 1960s when the state violated its freedom of association and jailed and forced its leaders into exile.[247] It was within this tradition that Micwu emerged as a Tucsa affiliate in the 1970s.

The 1956 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act which prohibited African workers from joining registered trade unions, had forced coloured and Indian union members into segregated branches controlled by a white executive. It was thus that Micwu's coloured workers were originally members of unions parallel to the white Motor Industry Staff Association (Misa), a clerical union, and the Motor Industry Employees' Union of South Africa (Mieu), a union representing artisans in the motor industry. Both were affiliated to Tucsa although the ultra-conservative Misa later withdrew in opposition to the federation opening up membership to coloured workers and never admitted coloured members into its ranks. Coloured and Indian workers were initially permitted to join Mieu as `B` class members, but the white union later instituted parallel membership where it represented them in all matters, including on the Industrial Council.[248] By the mid 1960s grand apartheid was at its height. The Nationalists had come to power in 1948 on a slim majority, but in the 1966 election it won 76 per cent of the 166 available parliamentary seats. As the government grew in confidence during the 1960s, so Tucsa moved to the right and a number of its more conservative unions threatened to disaffiliate unless it mirrored government separatist policies. In response Tucsa expelled its black trade unions in 1969.[249] Its attitude to the emerging non-racial unions of the 1970s was characterised by the same antipathy it demonstrated to Sactu. Indeed at times this dislike led it to implicate itself in questionable actions. In 1976 Arthur Grobbelaar, Tucsa's General Secretary, attacked a number of activists from the independent unions. This was followed by a Tucsa meeting with the security police, and the banning of these union leaders (including Mawu and UTP officials) followed thereafter.[250]

Tucsa's expulsion of its black trade unions in 1969 was responsible for the formation of Micwu. The white executive of the conservative Mieu instructed its parallel coloured members to form their own union. It provided the new union with start-up funds and Micwu was registered in 1960 as a Tucsa affiliate. In the early days most Micwu members were located in Natal with some members in the Western Province. All members were artisans although later in the 1970s the union extended its scope to include clerical workers, particularly Natal Indians in the motor industry. The union soon gained members in the Eastern Province, Transvaal, and Northern Cape where it established regional offices. They operated as a series of independent regions rather than as a

national union although policy was formulated at the centre. Over time the Western Cape branch recruited the largest membership whilst the Transvaal region was the smallest.[251] By the end of the 1970s its membership profile depended on the province in which it was recruiting. In the Western Cape and Natal coloured and Indian artisans predominated; in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape a mixture of blue and white collar mainly coloured mechanics and mechanic assistants prevailed; whilst in the Transvaal from the late 1970s onwards, African repair assistants and petrol pump attendants started to enter the union in greater numbers. Leadership of the union remained however politically conservative in the Tucsa tradition and coloured leadership dominated.[252]

Micwu operated a closed shop negotiated through the Motor Industry Industrial Council in all its factories which meant that new coloured and Indian workers of a certain grade and skill in a company automatically entered the union. The closed shop covered qualified artisans, motor trimmers, panel beaters, diesel mechanics, auto electricians, and vehicle bodybuilders. For a union such as Micwu clear advantages existed to being party to a closed shop as artisans in the motor industry worked in numerous small firms scattered throughout South Africa in cities and small rural towns. The closed shop enabled Micwu to accrue membership employing minimal staff and resources, but it also obviated significant contact with membership as little active organisation or recruitment was necessary. The Tuacc unions' emphasis on worker participation and democracy contrasted sharply with Micwu's style of organisation. In Micwu, when workers joined a company they simply filled in a stop-order form which was forwarded to the industrial council offices which in turn provided the member with a union number. Servicing of membership by officials usually entailed a phone call to the employer if a member had a problem. No active workplace committees existed. A former Micwu general secretary, Des East recalls,

> We didn't have a system of shop stewards. This we introduced just before we merged into Numsa [in 1987]. When we took on clerical workers they were the ones who started coming to meetings. Artisans only came to meetings when they were worried about their medical aid, they didn't need any protection in the workplace. If the employer did anything they didn't like they'd walk out. When the clerical workers came with their problems, the artisans would stay away from meetings. When Africans came into Micwu, general workers and labourers, then the clerical workers, who had now reached a nice level of wages, stopped coming to meetings. It was the person with the problems that attended the meetings.[253]

Nor did Micwu engage in industrial action to defend its members and strikes were unheard of in the union. In retrospect Micwu Natal Regional Secretary, Ekki Esau spoke of Mawu and Naawu with admiration, "They were bankrupt but they were prepared to take a stand. Our union didn't take a stand. We never had one strike. Our members could just walk out at any time and get more money. The black worker was underpaid, overworked and treated like a piece of dirt. That's the man who has nothing to lose."[254] In fairness Micwu's African membership was mainly unskilled and scattered across the country in small workplaces which made unified industrial action difficult.

Many were petrol pump attendants and, as Esau recalls, any threat of action was countered by employers threatening to install self service pumps.[255] Naawu and Mawu on the other hand had large concentrations of workers in some factories rendering unified action a greater possibility.

Unlike Mawu and to a lesser extent Naawu, Micwu was in a sound financial position. It relied on an efficient industrial council administrative system to which companies submitted membership subscriptions accompanied by a list of members' names. Its financial standing permitted Micwu to fund all its activities, to occupy well-equipped offices, and to employ skilled staff. It built a sound administration which boasted good filing systems which included a record of membership numbers and names and a record of benefit payments to which each member was entitled.[256]

Micwu bargained centrally on the National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi). In 1952 six regional motor industrial councils merged to form a national industrial council because all parties, but particularly the employers, had been dissatisfied with the discrepancies between the different regional agreements. By 1979 employer parties to Nicmi consisted of the South African Motor Industry Employers' Association (Samiea) and the South African Vehicle Builders' and Repairers Association (Savbra), the former being the largest. Trade unions party to the Council were the all white Mieu and Misa, and Micwu, the Asian and coloured workers union.[257] The white unions had for years employed the industrial council and the closed shop as mechanisms to exclude Africans from skilled jobs and to prevent them from undercutting white, and to a lesser extent, coloured and Indian artisan wages. Legislation permitted the Minister of Labour to reserve jobs for whites, and the closed shop system ensured that this legislation was implemented. White unions on the Council negotiated that skilled jobs be reserved for registered union members only. By definition this excluded African workers who were not permitted to join registered unions.

Micwu's relationship with the white unions on the industrial council was good. According to East, "We would be a united voice at the Industrial Council. The negotiations were led by the president of Mieu. He was very racist and conservative but he gave the workers a voice... We always worked together in a collective spirit but not on training, that's where employers always tried to spilt us."[258] Misa and Mieu took a decision not to train coloured workers, and over time this voluntary decision took on the force of law for all concerned. It was thus that unions such as Mieu manipulated competition on the labour market in order to control the supply of artisans and maintain high white wages. It accomplished this by controlling the entry of apprentices into the industry. Nothing in the Apprenticeship Act of 1922 prevented a worker of any colour from acquiring an apprenticeship contract with an employer which, when workers passed their trades test, would lead to artisan status. Artisans were trained through the Apprenticeship Board and the Act provided for Apprenticeship Committees where organised white labour, organised employers,

and the Department of Labour sat. Mieu and Misa used their seats on the Apprenticeship Committee to block applications by employers to recruit African apprentices. Micwu was excluded from the Apprenticeship Committees except in Natal.[259] Over time, coloured and Indian workers received artisanal training by other means. As white artisans progressively moved into white collar jobs, job reservation for coloured and Indian workers was barely enforced, and they were increasingly trained on the job. African workers continued to be excluded, a situation in which Micwu collaborated, "We were coloured nationalists in those days." commented Esau.[260]

In the 1970s Tucsa, in yet another reversal informed by the Nationalist's move towards the politics of reforming apartheid, reopened its ranks to unregistered unions and advised its affiliates to form African parallels.[261] Thus in the late 1970s Micwu, observing changing trends in trade union organisation, decided to recruit African workers into a parallel union. According to Esau, "We started very late organising black workers as we relied on the closed shop and Micwu formed a parallel union for African workers in about 1978 because we were a registered trade union and weren't allowed to take in African members at the time. Immediately the new legislation [the Wiehahn laws] came in 1980 we changed our constitution to take in African workers."[262] In the 1970s however, African workers were second class members so they could not be party to a closed shop nor the benefits that the industrial council system afforded.

In its decision to organise African workers Micwu entered into competition with the independent Mawu, and to some extent with the former Tucsa motor unions on the recruitment of coloured workers. In the Eastern Cape, Numarwosa began to recruit coloured artisans in the component's industry who were dissatisfied with Micwu's lack of servicing. In the late seventies and early eighties however, it was Mawu and Micwu who chiefly conflicted as they competed for African members in the same factories. In the Transvaal, Mawu was beginning to organise vehicle body building firms and the competition in some of the larger companies was to turn nasty. This hostility was fuelled by employers and the state who made a determined attempt to undermine Mawu's emerging shop floor structures by promoting liaison committees, and on an industry level, through the participation in, and promotion of, industry wide bargaining on industrial councils. Employers actively encouraged the organisation of African workers by registered unions. At Hendred Freuhauf on the East Rand in early 1980, for example, where Mawu had 264 members out of a workforce of 316 black workers, management invited Micwu into the factory to address workers. Mawu shopstewards recorded the response,

> [Ron] Webb [general secretary Micwu] was called in to address workers asking them to join his parallel union. The meeting was held on the factory premises during working hours. The workers empathically rejected him. Management also tried to persuade workers to either choose Webb's parallel union or a company union rather than Mawu. Webb also informed management that Mawu caused strikes, sought disruption and received money from Russia and East Germany. The workers refused to resign from the

union.[263]

Micwu was not party to the IMF South African Co-ordinating Council at this point so there was little possibility of forging a united strategy in these sub-sectors of the motor industry. By the close of the 1970s the metal sector was characterised by the possibility of much greater co-operation in certain sectors of the industry such as auto and engineering, but by significant divisions in the motor sector. Such divisions were to undermine worker power in this already weaker sector of the metal industry.

7. Unity and organisational space

Despite the survival and strengthening of the independent unions in the late 1970s they remained small, mainly local, isolated and fragmented: Mawu in the Transvaal, Micwu in the Western Cape and Natal, Uaw/Numarwosa in the Eastern Cape, and WPMawu in the Western Cape. Union membership was small. Mawu, for example, had organised only one tenth of the estimated 500 000 workers in metal/engineering.[264] Trade union unity both within the metal sector and across the independent unions in all industries, was limited, and their power to represent and promote their interests across the society more generally was tiny. Internal bureaucratic capacity, particularly in Mawu, was weak. If it was to grow and extend its influence in the next decade its administrative capabilities would have to improve. It was the launch of Fosatu in 1979 which was to signal a way forward for these small, disunited unions. It would also provide an example of the power that solidarity could muster for future unity initiatives.

Each union was attempting to expand its membership and increase its influence and it was a Numarwosa initiative that broke through this isolation. Numarwosa had remained outside any federation since its decision to withdraw from Tucsa in 1976. The idea of forging a new federation arose when its leadership raised the possibility of merging Numarwosa and UAW. It arrived at the view that only through the support of a unified national federation could the independent unions survive and grow in the face of a hostile state. Its expansion to Durban and Pretoria had allowed for growing contact with the emerging unions. In Durban it had made contact with Tuacc through the IMF Southern African Co-ordinating Council and discovered a group with similar goals and the same feeling of isolation. As Alec Erwin, a Tuacc official, explained, “We felt isolated and we believed a national movement would give us greater protection. Some people claimed unions like Numarwosa were bureaucratic because they were well run but we began to see that a union didn’t have to lose its militancy if it was run properly. We believed we could learn from their style of unionism.”[265] Tuacc had already raised the possibility within its ranks of forming a larger more broad based federation and its decision in 1977 that both Mawu and CWIU should become national unions fed into this view. Thus when Numarwosa approached Tuacc, CIWW, the

Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (representing the UTP unions), and the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau (WPWAB) to consider unity, Tuacc resolved to play a leading role. At a joint meeting it proposed a tight federation based on common policies underpinned by the principle of workers' participation and political independence. The meeting resolved to establish a Feasibility Committee to continue negotiations on the formation of a new federation.[266]

Ultimately both the WPWAB and Ccobtu decided not to enter Fosatu. The former expressed a fear of Tuacc dominance and argued that it was too early to form a federation which had not been demanded by workers. It contended that a unity forged by officials could only augment the power of officials.[267] Ccobtu on its part had raised a number of objections to unity such as Saul's firing of Faya in 1976 which some believed was an attempt to suppress black leadership; Mawu's decision to organise in Springs where UTP unions had established a foothold; and that Ccobtu envisaged a much looser form of co-operation.[268] A number of African workers in the Ccobtu group however discovered that they had received no report back on unity moves from leadership, and decided to meet the Feasibility Committee independently. This initiative led to the Glass & Allied Workers Union, the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union, the Sweet Food & Allied Workers Union and a section of EAWU, entering the federation.[269] Meanwhile Sauls had approached WPMawu which was to enter the new federation and provide its first president, Joe Foster.[270] Although some Tucsa parallel unions in Ccobtu had shown an interest in the unity initiative, Micwu was not one of them. As East recalls, "We were still part of Tucsa. We were not in the International Metal Federation, and Naawu [sic][271] was, and we were not organising the same membership so we did not clash. But we just didn't like their leadership - Fred Sauls and Joe Foster. So we, for the time being, stayed on in Tucsa."[272] East's explanation was of course only part of the story as more fundamental differences existed, as previously described, between Micwu and the metal unions in Fosatu.

Parallel to these unity initiatives, the state was formulating new reform policies. The National Party was increasingly concerned that if the large number of small worker organisations emerging countrywide were not granted basic rights, they would move in a revolutionary direction. It had learnt from the 1976 Soweto uprising that repression had mobilised thousands of young people into active opposition to apartheid and many had joined the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe. It thus appointed the Wiehahn Commission to make recommendations on existing labour legislation.[273] The core group of unions in the unity initiative, namely Tuacc, CIWW and UAW/Numarwosa, decided to submit objections to existing labour laws as well as proposals for reforming them. It was an important moment in cementing unity between them.[274]

Two years after the first meeting, in April 1979, 12 unions (3 registered and 9 unregistered)

representing 45 000 workers launched the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu). It was the first national labour federation in South Africa to build worker power through structures that ensured policy was controlled by worker leadership. Policy dictated that the president and vice-president should be full-time workers and that worker representatives to Fosatu structures must emanate from organised factories. Fosatu was founded on the same principles as the Tuacc unions and, like Mawu, it was committed to non-racial industrial unions based on the principles of worker control, shopfloor organisation, independence, international worker solidarity and trade union unity. It was a tight federation committing affiliates to the implementation of common policies and shared organising, administrative and education resources.[275] The Federation would become an important support to the emerging unions in their struggle to grow and extend their influence in the 1980s in the changed environment provided by the Wiehahn laws. Sauls viewed it as `the major achievement`[276] of the seventies. After its launch Erwin encapsulated Fosatu's role as "a vehicle for practical co-operation between its affiliated unions and a means of giving ... its weak black union movement a shot in the arm."[277]

In the same year another important development unfolded which was not unrelated to the growing power of these unions. The Wiehahn Report recommended that African workers be recognised as employees in the law and would thus be entitled to form registered trade unions. On the basis of this 3 laws were promulgated between 1978 and 1981[278] which bestowed on African workers a range of union rights from admittance into official bargaining structures, including industrial councils, to the legal right to strike within the framework of stipulated procedures. The legislation also created an industrial court where employer and trade union rights under the new system would be defined and where precedents for fair employment practices binding both employers and employees could be set. Finally, the laws established the National Manpower Commission which would monitor the new system and advise the government.[279] It was thus that the state aimed to incorporate, and tame, the independent unions.

The Wiehahn laws were a major achievement for the independent unions, and a significant breakthrough. Their understated organising methods had successfully manoeuvred the state towards reform rather than further repression and had thereby succeeded in opening up new organising spaces. Tarrow has explored why contentious politics only emerges in particular periods of history and why social movements sometimes flourish and at other times vanish into sectarianism and repression. He concludes that an important factor in the birth of a viable social movement is a shift in political opportunities and constraints. Such changes reveal where the authorities are vulnerable and permit, through the employment of strategic collective action, new opportunities to reveal themselves which lower the cost of action for ordinary people.[280] The Wiehahn laws were such a catalyst in the creation of social movement unionism. In the 1980s the

independent unions would grasp these opportunities, supported by lessons learnt in the 1970s as well as by the emergence of strong worker leadership and a core of committed members.

8. Conclusion

By the 1970s a strong national economy had emerged in South Africa. Accompanying this was the emergence of a larger, more homogenous, settled and more skilled proletariat. Large numbers of black workers were herded together in some sizeable factories which increased the potential bargaining power of the black working class. These changes created greater structural possibilities for the formation of national industrial trade unions than ever before.

In this altered context the new metal unions emerged in the 1970s. Although divided ethnically and by different traditions and organising styles, they had all by the end of the decade attained sufficient stability to constitute a threat to the state and to thus force through legislative reforms. Yet if Macun's definition of trade union and working class power is considered, they still had a long way to go. Systemic racial and ethnic cleavages and deep divisions between migrant and urban Africans still mitigated against the attainment of working class power. There were exceptions, Numarwosa and UAW had moved a long way towards destroying ethnic boundaries in their union structures, but in the main divisions remained. Micwu continued to endorse racially defined unions, WPMawu's membership was almost solely coloured, and Mawu, although non-racial in constitution, was primarily a union of migrant African workers.

These metal unions' power was severely limited despite some gains. Levels of unionisation were low, recognition agreements few, and bargaining for improved wages and working conditions was proceeding in only a fraction of possible factories. An impressive degree of internal cohesion existed in these unions, but the huge task of integrating their different ideological, bureaucratic and organisational traditions had hardly been conceived of, let alone embarked upon (except in passing during the course of Fosatu unity talks[281]). Sufficient power to engage or co-operate with political parties or with the captains of industry was still a distant possibility.

Perhaps most remote of all was their ability to wield institutional power. A massive organisational drive still needed to be conducted if these unions were to develop the power `to shape the decision-making agenda`[282] and to influence the rules and regulations that directly affected their members. Intimations of such power had revealed themselves in the government's decision to open the industrial relations system to Africans, but the manner in which the unions would engage with this dispensation would be critical. It remained to be seen if they could manage such changes to their advantage and whether the strategies they adopted would weaken, limit or enhance their influence in the areas of bargaining, industrial relations legislation, and political processes.

The significance of trends established in the 1970s cannot however be overestimated in laying the foundations for the access to power in the 1980s. Although some of these fundamentals would be contested in the next decade, others would underpin future efforts at building, sustaining and wielding power. Power lay in the choice of national industrial unionism which unlike the new general unions entailed an emphasis on organisation rather than mobilisation. Organisation rested on strong, democratic shopsteward structures and `an acceptance of the ethic of union democracy and workers' control` had been firmly entrenched by the close of the 1970s.[283] Whilst white intellectuals had been unduly influential in Mawu's early days[284] by 1979 their power had been reduced. A new type of organiser was emerging in the late 1970s. Shopstewards who were dismissed in the course of their union activities became powerful organisers owing to the similarity in class background with those they sought to recruit and train. The surfacing of such organisers, combined with the focus on worker control, permitted the emergence of strong factory leadership and organic worker intellectuals. The seeds of a national metal union also existed with the spread of organisation into all the main industrial centres - Johannesburg, Pretoria, the East Rand, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London.

The survival of unions such as UAW/Numarwosa and Mawu had been linked to their innovative approaches, the range of tactics employed and the flexibility of their organising strategies. Mawu had, for example, progressed from generalised recruitment over a wide range of factories to the more focussed approach of achieving recognition in a small number of companies. This mode of operation was to serve them well in the rapidly changing environment of the 1980s.

By the end of the seventies the metal unions were poised to grow and exert their power in more significant ways. The Wiehahn laws were about to be passed and a new federation, Fosatu, had welded together the power of a sizeable number of well-organised workers. An appreciation of the need to consolidate and grow in order to wield greater power had developed. In the 1970s the key to survival had rested on the maintenance of a small unobtrusive, independent organisational and political profile. In the 1980s this strategy would come under severe contestation. To effect a decisive impact the unions had to increase their membership whilst maintaining high levels of factory organisation so that metal employers nationwide experienced a sustained assault. The following chapter will explore how these metal unions consolidated and extended their power and influence through large-scale, sustained growth and unity initiatives in the 1980s.

ENDNOTES

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[102] Ibid; Bonner, P "African urbanisation on the Rand" *Journal of Southern African Studies*; Bonner, P, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel (1993) "The Shaping of Apartheid: Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle" in *Apartheid's Genesis 1935 – 1962*, Ravan Press/ Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, South Africa.

[103] The Congress Movement, or Congress Alliance was often used as a short hand for the ANC. In the 1960s the Alliance consisted of the ANC, the white Congress of Democrats, the SA Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

[104] Lambert, RV (1993) "Trade Unionism, Race, Class and Nationalism in the 1950s Resistance Movement" in Bonner, P, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel *Apartheid's Genesis 1935 – 1962*, Ravan Press and Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, South Africa; Luckhardt, K and Brenda Wall (1980) *Organize or Starve: The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

[105] Lambert, RV (1993) "Trade Unionism, Race, Class and Nationalism".

[106] Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today*.

[107] The four campaigns were the June 1957 pound-a-day strike, the April 1958 election strike, the March 1960 anti-pass strike, and the May 1961 Republic Day strike.

[108] Lambert, RV (1993) "Trade Unionism, Race, Class and Nationalism".

[109] "Batons and bare heads: the strike at Amato Textiles, February 1958" Phil Bonner/Rob Lambert in *The politics of race class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa* (1987) Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido (eds), Longman Group UK.

[110] According to Luckhardt and Wall every metal union organizer was detained or banned by 1963. In fact some had also gone into exile and Vuyisile Mini, a Sactu metal sector organiser in Port Elizabeth, was found guilty of murdering a police informer and hanged in November 1964.

[111] Lambert, RV (1993) "Trade Unionism, Race, Class and Nationalism"; Lambert, R and Eddie Webster (1986) "The Re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa" in Cobbett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa: Review of African Political Economy*, African World Press, New Jersey.

[112] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989): *Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa* Skotaville, Johannesburg.

[113] O'Meara, D (1996) *Forty Lost Years* Ravan Press, South Africa; Webster, E (1988) "The Rise of Social-Movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa" in *State Resistance and Change in South Africa* P Frankel, N Pines and Mark Swilling (eds) Croom Helm, London.

[114] Bonner, P, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel (1993) "The Shaping of Apartheid Contradiction,

Continuity and Popular Struggle" in *Apartheid's Genesis 1935 – 1962*, Ravan Press/Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, South Africa.
[115] Ibid; Bonner, P and Lauren Segal (1998) *Soweto: A History* Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town.
[116] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989): *Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa*, Skotaville, Johannesburg.
[117] Bonner, P and Lauren Segal (1998) *Soweto: A History*.
[118] Patel, Leila (1989) *Towards a democratic welfare system: options and strategies* Johannesburg Co-ordinating Committee against the welfare policy, Johannesburg, South Africa.
[119] *South African Labour Bulletin* "The Changing structure of the workforce: 1965 – 1985" Hindson D and Owen Crankshaw Vol 15 No 1 June 1990.
[120] Lipton, M (1985) *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910-1986*, David Philip, Claremont, South Africa; Webster, Eddie (1985): *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries* Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
[121] Crankshaw, Owen & Doug Hindson (1990): "New jobs, new skills, new divisions - the changing structure of SA's workforce" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 1 June 1990.
[122] Crankshaw, Owen (1994:158) *Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour Under Apartheid* PhD University of the Witwatersrand.
123 Sitas, Ari (1983:222): *African Worker Responses on the East Rand*. PhD, University of Witwatersrand.
[124] Crankshaw, Owen (1994) *Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour Under Apartheid* PhD University of the Witwatersrand.
125. Numsa (1989): *Numsa Women Organise!* (Numsa).
[126] Crankshaw, O (1993:4): `On the Doorstep of Management: Upward Mobility of African Workers in the Metal Industry and its Implications for Trade Union Organisation`, *SA Sociological Review* (6) 1, 1993.
[127] Von Holdt, K (2003:54): *Transition from Below: Forging trade unionism and workplace change in South Africa* University of Natal Press, South Africa.
[128] South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey 1977*.
[129] Martin, Ross (1989:137) *Trade Unionism: Purposes and Forms* Clarendon Press, Oxford.
[130] Alexander, Peter (2000:4): *Workers, War & the Origins of Apartheid.*
[131] Ibid.
[132] Bonner, P and Lauren Segal (1998) *Soweto: A History*.
[133] Bonner, P, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel (1993:3) "The Shaping of Apartheid Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle".
[134] South African Institute of Race Relations , *A Survey* 1978.
[135] Sitas, Ari (1983:256): *African Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in the Metal Industry, 1960 -1980* PhD, University of Witwatersrand.
[136] Ibid, p259.
[137] Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny* Verso, London.
[138] Maree, Johann (1992) *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy* (unpublished).
[139] Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
[140] Horner, D "African labour representation up to 1975" in *The Independent Trade Unions 1974 – 1984 :Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, (1987) ed Johann Maree, Ravan Press, Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[141] Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*; Webster, E (1988) "The Rise of Social-Movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa" in *State Resistance and Change in South Africa* P Frankel, N Pines and Mark Swilling (eds) Croom Helm, London.
[142] Bonner, P and Lauren Segal (1998) *Soweto.*
[143] O'Meara, D (1996) *Forty Lost Years*.
[144] Bonner, P and Lauren Segal (1998) *Soweto.*
[145] Ibid; O'Meara, D (1996) *Forty Lost Years*.
[146] Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*. Ensor notes that job

reservation never affected more than 3 per cent of jobs in the country, and by 1978 it affected only 0,5 per cent of them. ("Tucsa's relationship with African Trade Unions: An attempt at control" Ensor L (1978) in Webster (ed) *Essays in South African Labour History, Ravan Labour Studies 1*, Ravan, Johannesburg. It was chiefly the white trade unions that blocked promotional opportunities for blacks, and particularly Africans.

[147] Fairbairn, Jean (1991:29): *Flashes in her Soul: The Life of Jabu Ndlovu*, Natal Worker History Project.

[148] Ibid, p30.

[149] Qabula, Alfred Temba (1989:65): *A Working Life, Cruel Beyond Belief*, National Union of Metalworkers, Natal.

[150] "Levy Mamobolo The People's Mayor" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 20 No 1 Feb 1996.

151. Interview Samuel Mthethwa, Durban, February 1987. Mthethwa joined Dunlop's Sydney Road plant in Durban in 1974 and a decade later joined Mawu and brought the union to the company where in 1984 he was elected chair of the shopstewards committee. He left the union in 1984 to become an ANC provincial MEC.

[152] Makhoba, Mandlenkosi (1984:6,18,19) *The Sun Shall Rise For The Workers/Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi*, *Ravan Worker Series* Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

153. Interview Mike Murphy, Johannesburg 1997. Murphy worked in the GFWBF before he became General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in 1974, was banned from union and political activity in 1976, and subsequently left for Britain where he became Fosatu's International Research Officer.

[154] Maree, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*, (unpublished).

[155] Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*; Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today*.

156 Interview Dr Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg October 1996. Fanaroff was a Mawu organiser from its inception in 1973 and in 1987, when Mawu merged into Numsa, became a National Organiser for the Engineering sector of the union and overall co-ordinator of the Collective Bargaining Department.

[157] Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu: The emergence of trade unions in Natal and the development of a new trade union tradition" History Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand; Bonner, P "Focus on Fosatu" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 5 No 1 May 1979.

[158] Lowry, D (1999:189): *20 Years in the Labour Movement The Urban Training Project and Change in South Africa 1971 -1991*, Wadmore Publishing, Johannesburg.

159 The term `emerging unions` refers to those unions which were formed in the early 1970s. They were often referred to as `black` unions because most of their members were African, Indian or Coloured (despite the fact that many had non-racial constitutions). The term is used to distinguish them from the `established` union movement which was closed to African workers before 1979 and generally represented more skilled, higher paid white workers. (Friedman, 1987)

[160] Marie, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*, unpublished.

[161] Buhlungu, Sakhela (2001) *Democracy and modernisation in the making of the South African trade union movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973 – 2000* unpublished PhD University of the Witwatersrand.

[162] Mamdami, Mahmood (1996:238): *Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism: Citizen and Subject*, David Philips, Cape Town.

163 Murphy described the white intellectuals' politics thus, "Part of it was from the late 1960s and the possibility of a French worker take-over. This stuff came through Rick Turner, later murdered by apartheid agents, who was studying in France at the time. Also the British stuff - there was a hugely militant shopfloor pressure at the time and this was the new way forward. The Prague Spring, the whole mid 1960s development of new ideas about socialism in Europe was an important influence on us. In France there were workers occupying plants saying we're going to take over plants and that linked to other parts of labour history like the Wobblies in the USA, the car worker occupations in the 1940s in the USA - a tradition of socialism that was looking for alternatives."

[164] Interview, Mike Murphy, Johannesburg 1997.

[165] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg December 1996.

[166] Khubeka, Sipho (1994:26): "The struggle to be reborn: 20 years of the labour movement" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 18 No 5 Nov 1994.
[167] Maree, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*, (unpublished).
168. Interview Sipho Khubeka, Johannesburg January 1997. Khubeka was a clerk who was dismissed for union activities in 1974, joined the Industrial Aid Society in the Transvaal, and went on to become the branch secretary of Mawu before his banning in 1976. He later became an organiser, and general secretary in the Paper, Print & Allied Workers Union (Ppwawu).
169 Ibid.
[170] University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department Mawu Collection AH 1077/ C1.7.3.2.15 "Federation of South African Trade Unions 4.10.85: To All Nedcom Reps"; Lambert, R and Eddie Webster (1986) "The Re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa" in Cobbett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa: Review of African Political Economy*, African World Press, New Jersey.
171 This survey was conducted at the end of 1975 and investigated three Tuacc unions including Mawu.
172 Interview Mike Murphy, Johannesburg, 1997.
173 Interview Sipho Khubeka, Johannesburg, January 1997.
[174] Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu: The emergence of trade unions in Natal and the development of a new trade union tradition" Department of History Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand.
[175] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[176] Maree, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*.
[177] The Urban Training Project (UTP) was a Transvaal service organisation formed in 1970 by existent and former Tucsa officials who had been organising African parallel unions. They came together to educate African workers on their rights, and to assist them in forming trade unions. By 1975 it was servicing 10 African unions who grouped together to form Ccobtu (Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions).
[178] Lowry, D (1999): *20 Years in the Labour Movement.*
179. The Sullivan and EEC Codes were US and British documents respectively which attempted to set up labour guidelines for British and US subsidiaries operating in South Africa. Such guidelines included trade union recognition. Both codes were voluntary and the unions were to discover that they had few teeth. At times they were employed by companies to bypass worker demands where they argued that they were implementing the codes and thus it was not necessary to bargain directly with union members.
[180] Maree, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*.
181 Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February1997. Schreiner joined Mawu as an organiser in its Natal Pietermaritzburg Branch in 1979 and later moved into Numsa to become a national research officer in head office.
182 Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[183] Lowry, D (1999:204): *20 Years in the Labour Movement.*
[184] Maree, Johann (1992): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*.
185 The union was initially called Numawosa (National Union of Motor Assembly Workers of SA) but it later extended its scope to include rubber workers in the automobile components section, and moved into the Eastern Cape tyre companies in 1970. As a result, the union changed its name to the National Union of Motor Assembly and ***Rubber*** Workers of South Africa (Numarwosa).
186 Adler, Glenn (1994): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986, PHD thesis (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University.
187 Griffiths, Ieuan L. "The South African motor industry." *The Standard Bank Review* 631 (October 1977).
188 Adler, Glenn (1994): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It".
189 Nieuwenhuizen, P.J, et al. *The South African Component Manufacturing Industry* Johannesburg: Federation of Component Manufacturers' Associations, 1977.
190 Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today.*

191 Maree, Johann (1992:626): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*.
192 In the 1960s white workers had requested that the Minister of Labour set up an Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry and the Council had been granted the legal space to bring coloured and white workers into the same framework. Deane was not attempting to organise African workers who were excluded from the Act.
193 "National Union of Motor Assembly & Rubber Workers of South Africa: In the beginning, 9 October 1979", personal copy.
194 Adler, Glenn (1994:213,214): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in it".
195 Ibid, p224.
196 Ibid, p218.
197 Ibid.
198 "National Union of Motor Assembly & Rubber Workers of South Africa: In the beginning".
199 Ibid.
200 Sauls, Freddie (1980:53): "Interview with Freddie Sauls, General Secretary of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 6 Nos 2 & 3 September 1980.
201 Ibid.
202 Faya, originally from Durban, joined UTP in 1972 after working as a social worker for the Durban Catholic diocese. He had been banned previously for two years by the government for his work in the anti-communist Fofatusa (Federation of Free African Trade Unions) and held PAC sympathies. When he became UAW's national secretary he worked in Numarwosa's Port Elizabeth offices. (Lowry)
203 Lowry, D (1999): *20 Years in the Labour Movement*.
204 Adler, Glenn (1994:230): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It".
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid, pg 235.
207 Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 6 Nos 2 & 3, September 1980.
208 Adler, Glenn (1994:230): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It".
209 Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW".
210 Written communication with author, Daniel Dube, 28 June 2002.
211 Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW".
212 Sauls, Freddie (1980: 60,61): "Interview with Freddie Sauls, General Secretary of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 6 Nos 2 & 3 September 1980.
213. Interview Gloria Barry., Port Elizabeth, 1997. Barry was a former Eveready worker, vice-president of Numarwosa and later a union administrator.
214 Ibid.
215 The company ignored the procedures for conducting a legal strike and refused balloting facilities required under the Labour Relations Act. But with ingenuity union officials made their own plan as Barry recounted, "So what we decided to do, was we hired a bus for the day. And we put that bus in front of the factory gate on the opposite side of the road from the gate... we had all the ballot forms and boxes and everything in the bus... so, instead of the factory buses being there, there was the union bus. As the people got onto the bus, they sat in their seats, and we addressed them... once they understood the balloting procedures we gave them the ballot forms, and the bus went off, people balloted, cast their vote, they put it in the box, and once everybody's votes was in the box we just got off the bus with the box and the bus took the people into the various areas where they lived, and that was how we got the result of the 64 per cent."
216 Friedman, Steven (1987:198): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
217 *Daily Dispatch*, 1 November1979.
218 Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
219 Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW".
220 *Evening Post*, 1 Nov 1979.

[221] Sauls, Freddie (1980: 62, 63): "Interview with Freddie Sauls".
[222] Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW".
[223] *The Star*, 29 Nov 1979.
[224] Friedman, Steven (1987:198): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
[225] Maree, Johann (1980): "The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW"
[226] Ibid; Friedman, Steven (1987:198): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
[227] Ibid; Adler, Glenn (1994:230): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It"
[228] Friedman, Steven (1987:198): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
[229] Phone interview, Joe Foster September 2004.
[230] Evans, Gavin (1982:19): The Leyland Strike in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No 2, 1982.
[231] Ibid, p20.
[232] Phone interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Wages Commission (1982:37): *An Introduction to Labour Organisation in South Africa*, Wages Commission (UCT), Cape Town.
[235] Phone interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
[236] Sauls, Freddie (1980:54): "Interview with Freddie Sauls".
[237] The International Metalworkers' Federation was the largest international trade secretariat representing metal unions throughout the west with a combined membership of 14 million in the 1970s. It attempted to build regional co-operation between its unions by creating IMF local councils. It had been active in South Africa before the 1970s when it supported the registered craft unions and had endorsed racially divided parallel unions. The emerging unions in the 1970s forced it to change its stance and it formed an SA Council where it invited emerging unions to join.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Luckhardt, K and Brenda Wall (1980:187) *Organize or Starve The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
[240] Lowry, D (1999): *20 Years in the Labour Movement.*
[241] Tom, Petrus (1985): *My Life Struggle* Ravan Workers Press Series, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
[242] Wages Commission (1982:37): *An Introduction to Labour Organisation in South Africa.*
243. Tom, Petrus (1985): *My Life Struggle* Ravan Workers Press Series, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
[244] Ibid.
245 Ibid, p54.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Lowry, D (1999): 20 *Years in the Labour Movement.*
[248] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, November 1996. Esau was the Regional Secretary of Micwu in Natal in the 1970s, and in the 1980s a regional secretary of the IMF (International Metal Federation) in Natal and later Regional Secretary of Numsa Southern Natal.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
251 Interview Ekki Esau , Johannesburg, November 1996.
[252] Phone interview Des East, June 2004.
253 Interview Des East, Johannesburg, June 1997. East was General Secretary of Micwu in 1981 and Tucsa's First Vice President in 1983. He became Numsa's Administrative Secretary in 1987.
[254] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[255] Ibid.
256 Interview Des East, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[257] University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B83 "Confidential: For Numsa Only: The proposed withdrawal of the South African Motor Industry Employers' Association (SAMIEA) from the National Industrial Council for the Motor industry (Nicmi)".
258 Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996
259 Interview Des East, Johannesburg, June 1997

260 Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
261 Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*.
262 Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
263 Webster, Eddie (1985:239): *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries* Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
264 Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*.
265 Adler, Glenn (1994:227): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It".
266 Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu".
267 Ibid.
268 Lowry, D (1999): *20 Years in the Labour Movement.*
269 Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu".
270 Phone interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
271 Naawu (National Union of Automobile and Allied Workers Union) was in fact formed in October 1980 whereas Fosatu was launched in 1979.
272 Interview Des East, Johannesburg, June 1997.
273 O'Meara, Dan (1996) *Forty Lost Years*.
274 Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu".
274 Phone interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
275 Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu".
276 Sauls, Freddie (1980:56): "Interview with Freddie Sauls.
277 Friedman, Steven (1987:184): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
278 These laws were the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act 94 of 1979, the Industrial Conciliation Act 11 of 1980, and the Labour Relations Amendment Act 57 of 1981. At first the law stated that migrant workers could not be union members and join registered unions which made it impossible for the emerging unions to register as the majority of their members were migrants. The unions, through Fosatu, forced Minister of Labour, Fanie Botha, to change the law and grant migrants union rights.
279 Murray, Martin (1987) *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny*; O'Meara, Dan (1996) *Forty Lost Years*.
280 Tarrow, S (1998): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
281 Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu".
282 Wright, E O (1994:539) "Political Power, Democracy and Coupon Socialism" in *Politics and Society* Vol 22 No 4, 1994.
283 Maree, Johann (1992:746): *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy*.
284 According to Maree, "Intellectuals played an immensely important role in the independent unions form the outset. They planned union strategies that helped ensure their survival against a hostile state and concerted managerial counter offensive, they administered and co-ordinated union affairs, they helped to train and educate workers in trade union organisation, they assisted the unions in obtaining vitally required finance from abroad, and they made strategic use of legal action to help the unions gain a foothold and make organisational advances." (Maree, 1992:747)

Chapter 2
Building power through numbers

1. Introduction

Any trade union wishing seriously to alter the working conditions of its members will at some point have to address the question of growth and numbers. For trade unions whose primary constituency is highly replaceable semi- and unskilled workers the question of growth is pivotal because they cannot rely on the scarcity of their members' skill as a bargaining weapon. Additional obstacles and imperatives facing trade unions in the metal sector were the acutely difficult working conditions and powerful employer organisations.

The issue of growth presented emerging metal unions, especially Mawu, with a serious dilemma since, in the interests of survival, they had adopted a policy of limiting growth, not spreading their resources too thinly, and consolidating organisational strength and power in a limited number of factories. But this was clearly not a sufficient strategy if it was to make any real impact on the industry. Maree has aptly described a trade union as consisting of "...working class wage earners who combine to defend and advance the interests of their members but also of broader segments of the working class. They do so at a number of levels, but firstly at the workplace. As they grow in size and strength they develop the capacity to do so at other levels: of industry and the economy as a whole."[1] The challenge confronting these unions was essentially the imperative to grow rapidly and increase their power and influence in the industry whilst retaining their organisational coherence. In order to achieve the objectives of defending and advancing workers' interests it is necessary for unions, from time to time, to challenge both management control and the power of the state. The only weapon trade unions have in this uneven contest, where in the main both capital and the state are unwilling to listen, is the wielding of power in order to secure a hearing, and at times, to force the hand, of powerful forces in opposition to their interests. If trade unions represent a sizeable proportion of their constituency who are vociferous in their own interests it becomes increasingly difficult for the organs of power to ignore them.

The acquisition of power for trade unions is obviously not simply a question of numbers - strategic selection of companies, the strength of workplace structures; the strength of internal union organisational cohesion; the unity of membership's goals; the strategic use of conflict; and the overall strategies and policies the trade union adopts, will all affect its access to power but without numbers to champion these strategic visions there can be no implementation of demands and no victories. Union growth is however itself multifaceted being governed by economic, social, political, and organisational factors which embrace questions of leadership, union structure, unity,

mergers, alliances, legal reforms and so on.

In the early 1980s the unions under review in this study did not possess this numerical power. Their membership was unevenly distributed and they had little power to influence the strategic direction of a large national company, let alone to shape entire economic and industrial sectors or to force the hand of the apartheid state. The 1980s substantially enhanced these unions' abilities to make gains for their members and to influence the trajectory of the metal industry. Numerical growth was a fundamental to that exercise. This chapter explores the multiple reasons for this growth, not least among them the keen appreciation of the leadership for the need to grow, and their awareness of how strategic decision-making could enhance this growth whilst ensuring organisational coherence.

In order to explore the theme of the acquisition of power through numerical increase, this chapter will firstly investigate how and why numerical growth took place and what strategies the unions employed to maintain organisational coherence during this period of unprecedented expansion. The latter discussion leads into the second major issue dealt with in this chapter namely the various unions' pursuit of trade of union unity through the building of a single national industrial metal union which came to fruition in 1987 and which concentrated large numbers of metal workers into a single coherent organisation.

2. Numerical Growth

The economy and trade union growth

The unions had to contend with an hostile economic climate which on the face of it seemed to militate against any possibility of growth. The 1980s dawned to a very different economic context from a decade earlier when the new unions were beginning to take shape. Then the economy was still expanding. Now a decade of economic and political austerity was ushered in where South Africa entered one of its longest and deepest recessions.

There were multiple reasons for this protracted downswing in the economy but the most immediate was a world recession triggered in 1979 by the Iranian revolution which led to a huge increase in the oil price and the consequent rise in the cost of a range of imported manufactured goods. South Africa was initially cushioned from the effects of this worldwide recession by a gold price increase, but by 1981 a US war on rising prices prompted a sudden drop in the gold price which plunged South Africa into a recession marked by a negative growth in GDP for both 1982 and 1983 of minus 1,2 and minus 3,1 respectively.[2]

Although the world recession was over technically by 1983 the South African economy did not recover (except briefly in 1986) and over the course of the 1980s sank deeper and deeper into economic crisis. The global recession had served to highlight deep structural problems in the South African economy arising from a number of factors. South African industry was stagnating because of restricted domestic and international markets. The white consumer market had expanded during the 1960s economic boom but by the mid 1970s it had become saturated. In addition the manufacturing sector lacked the will to develop and orient itself to an export market - South African goods were too expensive and not internationally competitive. In the early 1980s capitalists turned to the possibilities of a black consumer market, but low wages and high prices blocked expansion in this sector.[3]

Closely related to this lack of expansion in its export markets was a Balance of Payments (BoP) problem as world demand for South African exports declined. Every phase of economic growth led to increased imports, producing a larger BoP deficit, and increased foreign debt. Already by 1986 the total value of imports was double the total value of exports.[4]

At the time, South Africa exported primary goods such as coal, iron, wool and intermediate goods like worked up steel, and imported capital goods such as machinery and transport equipment. However, world markets for primary goods were shrinking particularly as regards iron, coal and certain minerals, a situation which was compounded by reduced demand for products from South Africa's `smokestack` industries such as steel, heavy engineering, and chemicals. This had serious implications for South Africa's primary product exports. The Sishen-Saldanah iron exporting project for example, started exporting iron at a loss because of depressed world demand and prices.[5] A strong recovery of the US dollar and a declining gold price throughout the 1980s aggravated the situation.

Aggravating this debt crisis was a massive increase in government spending. A large portion of the national wealth was needed to maintain separate development and to sustain the `total strategy`. State expenditure rose at the rate of 18,5 per cent per annum from 1980. By 1984 it jumped to 29 per cent of GDP.[6] Huge sums were directed to a bloated bureaucracy of 19 separate education departments, 3 houses of parliament, 3 cabinets and President's Council, 9 homeland governments, to the military and police, to corrupt spendthrift homeland regimes, to the salaries of MPs and other civil servants, to sanctions-busting programmes and to the stockpiling of strategic items such as oil. In addition, during the early 1980s (1982-1986) a terrible four year drought struck the region necessitating big extensions of credit to farmers and causing the government in 1984 to borrow R6 billion. This was over and above previous debt repayments which already stood at R4 billion, and extensive borrowings abroad to pay for imports.[7]

The government's mounting domestic and international debt lowered the value of the currency in relation to other currencies which in turn sharply increased import prices. It thus cost capitalists twice as much to import machinery and goods from overseas. From the early to mid 1980s as many as 16 companies a day were going bankrupt and those that survived found their profit margins slashed as their energy, electricity and petrol costs increased by about 20 per cent.[8] In many cases companies passed on these costs to consumers and the price of basic goods and foodstuffs climbed steadily in an uncontrollable inflationary spiral.

The drift towards political ungovernability in the mid 1980s left the country even more economically exposed. Large scale township unrest (school, rent and consumer boycotts, and the struggle against black local authorities), related pressure from anti-apartheid lobbyists, and a sense of insecurity about the government's ability to repay its debts, caused banks to refuse to lend money to South Africa. Previously the government had borrowed large sums from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and foreign banks, but as less and less capital flowed into the country it was forced to use its foreign exchange reserves to repay bank loans. By 1985 its reserves were so low that it stopped repayment on all foreign loans. Lacking foreign exchange to buy machinery and other imports, the economy could not grow and the fiscal crisis deepened.

For workers the deepening economic crisis was devastating, the major effect being a massive loss of employment. The introduction of new technology and rationalisation cost thousands of unskilled workers their jobs. This accelerated during the 1980s. Between 1982 - 1983 African employment fell by 80 000 placing added burdens on those who had jobs to provide for a wider family network. The Swart Commission on rural poverty, for example, noted that unemployment in the Ciskei stood at fifty per cent in 1983.[9] All sectors suffered except food, basic metals and paper, and from 1980 to 1986 little more than 150 000 jobs were created at a time when the labour force swelled by an estimated 1,5 million.[10] For many smaller capitalists in the industry a decision to close operations or retrench was as a direct result of government's monetary policy embodied in its 1984 'Austerity Package' which, in its attempts to reduce the balance of payment deficit, took the form of an increase in interest rates on all forms of credit. Many smaller firms were unable to service their loans and were consequently forced out of business.

In addition the recession forced some employers into rethinking their mode of operation which resulted in further retrenchments. Some managements began to restructure in order to exit from the recession in a stronger position. It was a time to introduce new production methods, and to reduce labour costs in preparation for the next boom. The recession had alerted some capitalists to the fact that they needed to upgrade machinery and technology to increase their output if they were to

compete on international markets. New technology meant fewer workers and a move away from cheap unskilled labour. Over the decade this shift from people to machines cost thousands of jobs in the metal industry. Some companies introduced training programmes to prepare employees for the new technology and this provided the additional opportunity to discard unproductive, unsuitable workers. It was workers with skills that were spared the axe. Furthermore, selective retrenchment provided an opportunity to weaken the union in the factory and victimisation of union members and shopstewards was common. A Mawu organiser commented, "I think many factories are trying to get rid of union members. They want to kill the strength of the workers on the shop floor. So they say no there is no work, it is not because they are union members. Also they will say this guy has skills - he has a special job and we can't retrench him. And the workers know it is only because he is not a member of the union."[11] In addition, the recession provided companies with the opportunity to assess profit and productivity levels which gave rise to new management strategies. Some employers, for example, took the decision to retrench their entire workforce and to move to the homelands or decentralised zones where they could employ a cheaper workforce and benefit from government subsidies. There were others however who embarked on closures or staff reductions because of a refusal to accept falling rates of profit. As trade unionist, Dave Lewis expressed it, "Redundancies do not arise directly from declining volumes of work but rather from declining rates of profit."[12]

The South African state provided almost no protection from the ravages of unemployment except for a short-term, minuscule payout from the Unemployment Insurance Fund to which it obliged employers and employees to contribute, and which in any case was not available to all workers. Workers who resided in South Africa's homelands were regarded as foreigners and as such were not entitled to UIF or state pension benefits. The economic climate in which South African capitalists operated was almost completely unregulated in respect of redundancies and a free market ideology contributed to an environment where capitalists could absolve themselves of political and social responsibilities. As an economist remarked at the time, "By arguing that 'the market rules', management can legitimately make its decisions in 'economic isolation' ... it need only consider 'economic' or rather 'market' factors."[13] One employer's words went for many, "No negotiation at all over retrenchments. That's a purely financial matter and purely up to management. The employees' answer to any question about whether retrenchments were necessary would obviously be `No`."[14]

Furthermore this free market ideology was infused by issues of race. White employers were largely out of touch with the living conditions of their black employees as their perspective was mainly informed by what most immediately impacted on productivity and profit levels. As a statement emanating from a 1983 management conference on retrenchment procedures indicated,

"Retrenchments had a positive effect on company/worker relations, workers are now a little more worried about their jobs, and productivity has improved a lot because they know what can happen to them as well."[15] Many employers were so detached from the lives of their employees outside the workplace that they did not perform the most basic services for retrenchees such as informing them of unemployment benefits, or signing off their UIF cards when they left the job to enable them to access benefits.

A survey on the East Rand in 1984 showed that employers who had previously agreed retrenchment procedures or policies usually did not adhere to them. Notice of retrenchment ranged from none, 24 hours, 2 weeks, and in a few cases four to six weeks. TMF a large iron foundry, for example, informed workers on the morning they were retrenched, and when they protested locked them out of the factory. Many companies, to absolve themselves of responsibility and to avoid severance pay-outs, persuaded themselves that no notice was best, "Retrenchment was an immediate procedure, with no notice. We feel that if a person is going to be retrenched he would be told and allowed to leave immediately - from a morale point of view."[16] This was not how workers experienced it, as this foundry worker relates,

> I arrived on Monday afternoon for the night shift. I looked at the clock station for my clock card, it was not there. We stood outside because we didn't have the tickets and waited for boss Willen (foreman). We went to his office. There were eight from my department. When we arrived he came to his office, went in, and came out to say there is no more job for us. I asked him how can he dismiss me like that, I have worked since 1970. He said he can't do nothing there is no job. We came the next day to get our money. I went to George to complain about the retrenchment and he said I did not work well and that I became drunk. He did not want me to answer and then he just walked out. What he said was not true.[17]

Mandlenkosi Makhoba recalled the desperation that unemployment engendered,

> And when you are out of a job, you realise that the boss and the government have the power to condemn you to death. If they send you back home, and back home now there's a drought, and you can't get any new job, it's a death sentence. The countryside is pushing you into the cities to stay alive; the cities are pushing you into the countryside to die. You get scared. It's a fear that you come to know after a week without food. [18]

The indifference to former employees' survival meant that most companies would not enter prior discussion on the necessity to retrench or negotiate severance pay with the union. In 1984, for example, the Brits B&S company retrenched 240 workers. Only skilled union workers were retained. Workers were informed of the closure a week before it came into effect although there was evidence to indicate that Gundle Industries, had planned the lay-offs some time before. Negligible notice was a strategy to prevent workers from taking action against the closure. In addition the company had delayed signing a recognition agreement with Mawu seemingly as a tactic to ensure that no retrenchment agreement was in place. The company paid out a paltry sum in severance pay whereby workers with ten years service, were given three weeks severance pay,

and those with five years, received two weeks pay. Moreover, the company refused to adopt the LIFO principle so as to be able selectively to retrench and dispense with troublesome union members. Operating in a largely unregulated free market environment a senior executive at B&S could justify the job losses in this manner, "We are not in business to make a loss. When a plant is uneconomic you close it... When you are not prepared to back the industry anymore you are quite at liberty to sell it or to get out and say 'I don't wish to be the owner of this enterprise anymore!'... We can only protect jobs by closing a factory. Because by keeping it open it makes other factories non-viable."[19]

The group of workers who were most affected by retrenchments were the unskilled, contract worker. In general migrant workers were less educated than urban workers and in the recessionary environment employers were seeking to employ a more skilled, trainable workforce. However contrary to widespread perception, not all migrants were without education. In Webster's survey of union members who were predominantly migrants in the late seventies, 35 per cent of metal workers had no education, but 36 percent had Standard 4-5 (primary education), and 24 per cent had Standard 6- 7 (junior high school).[20] This statistic may reflect the fact that it was more educated workers who joined the unions in the early days, but it certainly points to the possibility that many migrant workers were highly trainable in new technology and new ways of working. Training opportunities for black workers in general, and migrants more specifically, was hard to access and migrants continued to be shed from the workforce.

The preponderance of job losses amongst contract workers also related to the release shortly before the onset of the recession of the government's Riekert Commission recommendations. The Riekert Commission was appointed simultaneously with the Wiehahn Commission in 1977 to examine the use of manpower in South African industry and it constituted part of the government's attempts at reform through divide and rule. The Commission recommended the division of African workers into those with permanent resident rights in urban areas, and those who were not eligible for resident rights and who would consequently be forced back into the Bantustans to provide an unemployed reserve army of labour. From 1980 onwards the East Rand Administration Board urged employers to recruit local labour whilst discouraging the recruitment of illegal labour in urban areas.[21] The aim was to create a more stable, privileged, urban class of African workers. This policy was accompanied by an increase in the provision of African high school education in the townships which resulted in the growth in employment of young educated township people. It was the recession that provided the ideal opportunity to effect this change in recruitment patterns and to dispense with those migrants with less education. This change in the nature of the workforce was reflected in the changing nature of leadership in the union. Philip Bonner, a university academic and Fosatu educator, commented, "We could see students whose education ended with

the Soweto uprising coming into factories. They were more political and militant in a different kind of way... Younger urban militants began to move into leadership... Migrants went along. More and more factories were becoming less migrant. Above all, shopstewards, and particularly branch leadership, were more dominated by educated younger people."[22] Mawu was aware of the way in which the system of migrant labour controlled, divided, and cheapened labour and through its commitment to organising across the black working class in all geographic areas it believed it could resist the state's divisive strategy. Ultimately though, through wide scale retrenchment of migrants the state put these workers beyond the union's reach. It was the urban African worker who became the main beneficiaries of the union's organising efforts whilst thousands of migrants were condemned to unemployment in impoverished homelands.

A survey conducted by Georgina Jaffee in 1984 of retrenched migrant workers from Dunswart Iron and Steel, provides a graphic picture of the fate of retrenchees. In 1983 the East Rand company Dunswart Iron and Steel retrenched 70 Kwa Zulu migrant workers most of whom were still serving their annual contracts. Mawu sued Dunswart for breach of contract, and in a landmark victory the company settled out of court giving each retrenchee R 500. On return to KwaZulu retrenchees hoped to farm their own land as a means of survival but that year saw a severe drought. A few had UIF cards but making use of these was fraught with problems. Uncertain days of payment collection, length of processing of applications, and costly transport because of distances from outlets meant that many did not claim their benefits. Most of them considered it futile to register as work-seekers because as a District Labour Bureau Officer commented:

> We know there are hundreds of men out there who don't even bother to come and register as unemployed. The companies do not recruit here any longer. Each week more migrants return home saying they have been retrenched or dismissed. Then they just go and sit in their huts and wait. If they leave for the cities they are illegal and could get arrested. There is nothing we can do. We watch them starve and if they come to the office to register for work we take their names. The files are already full.[23]

Many of their children began to starve and some families were forced to send their them away to grandparents in an attempt to distribute living expenses. Within four months of unemployment, the men had sold off their cows, goats and sheep. Some families, however, were forced to eat all their livestock and in consequence had nothing to sell. Some men in desperation sent messages to employed Dunswart employees for assistance. At times families lived on nothing but mieliemeal and many were showing signs of severe malnutrition. Old age pensions were an important source of cash income, even if inadequate at R57 a month (whites received R152 per month), but even these were hard to access and plagued with similar problems to obtaining UIF benefits.[24]

Whilst job losses continued apace, the value of wages for those still in employment was decreasing. Under the onslaught of inflation and taxation real earnings began to decline for African

workers from 1983, a situation further exacerbated by a significant drop, of about 40 per cent, in overtime which represented a major loss of income for the employed.[25] The decline in earnings was further eroded by government's response to the fiscal crisis which entailed discouraging internal spending in order to curb rising inflation through the mechanism of higher interest rates and tightened hire purchase terms. Interest rates on all forms of credit rose making if difficult to borrow. As a result demand for manufactured goods dropped, and capitalists curtailed production. Simultaneously the government increased taxation. In 1979 total revenue raised through tax was R7 988 million. By 1984 total government tax revenue was R23 500 million - a 270 per cent increase.[26] Government revenue became increasingly financed through taxation (individual, company, General Sales Tax (GST) and, later VAT) as raising loans became more and more difficult.[27] Initially it introduced a GST which exempted basic foodstuffs such as bread and meat but by 1987 it replaced this with a Value Added Tax (Vat) which, unlike GST, was charged on all goods and foodstuffs and hit workers' pockets even harder at the same time as higher taxes further eroded their wages. A desperation overcame workers as it became abundantly clear that employers had no sympathy with their predicament, "Clearly the primary mandate of the industrial relations boss during a recession is not to ensure `good communication` or `industrial peace` but to rather to press home the bosses' advantages by raiding the hard won preserves of the workers." commented a trade unionist at the time.[28] Most managements' notion of wages was still based on the assumptions that workers were remunerated as individuals and not as a family member responsible for increasing numbers of dependents. Surveys carried out in Soweto in 1983 however, showed that 50 per percent of households made payments to dependents elsewhere, usually living in Bantustans.[29]

The members of the metal unions were hard hit by this protracted recession and consequent rationalisation. Car sales slumped, for example, from a high of 32 500 in 1983 to a ten year low of 12 500 in 1986[30] (the particular nature and reasons for this downturn in the auto sector and the union's response will be explored later). By 1983, over 2 000 workers had already been laid off in the auto industry.[31] By 1986 over 6 000 workers had lost their jobs in the Port Elizabeth area alone. The loss of jobs in the auto assembly sector had major repercussions in other manufacturing industries reliant on these assembly plants. Around the country over 35, 000 workers in the motor assembly, components and motor retail industries lost jobs.[32] Workers in the metal and engineering industry too, were affected by the world recession. A rapid and steady growth in employment had occurred between 1978 to 1981. This was followed by a dramatic decline between 1982-1986 when 76 000 metal workers lost their jobs, and output fell by 11 per cent. From 1982 employers laid off tens of thousands of black workers in the sector. The trough came in 1986, even though output was still 8 per cent higher than in 1975. Output rose hereafter so that by 1989 the engineering industry was producing 20 per cent more than in 1977. Employment

however had only increased by 3 per cent.[33] Companies had used the recession to further mechanise and increase production using less workers.

It was against this depressed economic backdrop that the metal unions entered a period of unprecedented growth and industrial action, a period when, according to labour relations theory, and to patterns of unionisation elsewhere in the world, workers are expected to drop demands and focus on keeping their jobs. There were economic, political and social factors that often caught these unionists unprepared but to which they quickly responded and turned to their organisational advantage. The unions careful preparation in the 1970s fell on fertile ground in the 1980s. They were in the right place at the right time, and changes in material conditions were, contrary to expectation, conducive to a groundswell of unionisation

The most obvious material reason for this growth in membership was the mounting pressure on workers' living standards. Rising inflation by 1982 meant that bread prices had increased by 40 per cent, house rents by 30 per cent, and hostel rents by 70 per cent[34] while prices generally rose 11 per cent in 1983. Market Research Africa estimated that the average household income for Africans grew by less than 10 per cent in the same period.[35] A devastating drought in the countryside slashed the only other source of income for contract workers who made up 30 per cent of the East Rand workforce. Over the same period the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB) strictly applied influx control laws, particularly for workers living in shacks, forcing many migrants out of the cities. Desperate workers turned to militant action and the new unions for salvation.

However, as was noted earlier, it generally requires more than material pressures to produce sustained industrial action. What were these? Addressing a later period in the 1980s, Macun writes that "the connections between union growth and political activity is more tenuous than assumed."[36] He substantiates his claim by showing that the change in membership density was not marked with heightened political activity such as the repression in 1986 and unbanning of political parties in 1990. Macun then continues to make a more important point where he proposes that union growth was directly affected by micro political opportunities that were opened up to members on the factory floor. One of the attractions of the emerging unions for black workers was their role in providing a `voice` which was denied workers in other parts of the society where they were not acknowledged as citizens. The emerging unions were able to provide a representational voice, directly mandated from membership to representatives of the `apartheid workplace regime`[37] characterised by racism and authoritarianism, and in this way they gave common workers considerable power over immediate workplace conditions and events.

Micro political opportunities meant different things to different categories of workers. To metal workers on the East Rand, among whom migrants were preponderant, they meant above all security and a reduction of vulnerability in an ethos where black workers' lives were subject to the capricious whims of white foremen and dismissals were common.

Mawu and migrant workers

Unlike workers in the Eastern Cape auto industry, those on the East Rand were migrants. In the Eastern Cape, Naawu's membership comprised both African and coloured workers the majority of whom lived in coloured and African townships adjacent to the cities in which they worked. At Ford, for example, all African workers had Section 10 rights (under Section 10 of the Urban Bantu Areas Act, Africans could obtain rights to live in the city if they had worked in one company for ten unbroken years) and unlike Naawu membership in Durban and Pretoria, the Port Elizabeth branch had no migrant union members. Naawu's membership straddled jobs in both the secondary and subordinate primary labour market. The former required limited skill and involved highly repetitive tasks usually entailing some form of manual labour and low wages. The latter required a greater degree of skill, accompanied by higher wages and greater job security. [38]

In comparison Mawu members on the East Rand had much less bargaining power. As Transvaal Naawu organiser Taffy Adler noted,

> In the Transvaal both Mawu and Naawu organised African workers but in Mawu it was often migrant based. Motor workers in Naawu were generally urban based. I'm talking about people who lived in Brits and the homelands who would commute for a couple of hours a day like Soshanguve and rural townships in Bop [Bophuthatswana], Mamelodi, Atteridgeville. Originally in Mawu we organised the big steel processing plants - this is a different type of person from the person who works in the electronic industry. In the early days of Mawu we were organising in foundries and workers there were poorly educated, low paid, migrants. In components, workers were urban (out of Pretoria townships) less educated and sophisticated than in the assembly plants but not as badly off as people in the foundries.[39]

The increase in the number of black semi-skilled operative workers, the decline in unskilled work, and the drop in number of semi-skilled white, Coloured and Indian workers, discussed in the previous chapter, had opened the way for a huge growth in African unionism especially in the metal sector. In the early days however it was the "badly off" workers in the foundries and other migrants performing lower semi- and unskilled manual work in heavy engineering that formed the basis of Mawu's membership. Later the African semi-skilled workforce on the East Rand which had acquired a role in the production process entered the union in large numbers. Such workers, although not as strategically positioned as the auto workers in the Eastern Cape, nevertheless possessed a bargaining power which unskilled workers lacked.

It was these semi and un-skilled migrant workers who became the backbone of Mawu. Not many of the new echelon of African urban workers however, joined unions like Mawu in the beginning. Most of those who joined the union in the Transvaal and Natal had their roots in the countryside. According to Mawu's Fanaroff,

> Almost all workers were migrant workers, that was characteristic of the union in the early days. Some, as at Kraft Engineering, lived in Alexandra or Soweto but all of them saw themselves as temporary in the towns... even when they had lived all their lives in the towns. Like these guys Isaac Modise and Ledwaba. Their ambition was to get enough money to buy a few cattle and then go back to Northern Transvaal. People felt they were here to provide for their families and they wanted to go back home. All people at that time were migrants in heavy engineering.[40]

Typically a migrant working in the male dominated heavy engineering industry left his village, in say Kwa Zulu, driven out by drought, and inadequate and over-used land where it was impossible to eke out a subsistence living, knowing that his family could not survive without the wages he would earn in the city. His primary loyalty would reside with his family and home in the rural area. As Rely Precision migrant, Mandlenkosi Makhoba put it, "I work here [East Rand] but my spirit is in Mahlabatini [KwaZulu]"[41] Such migrants were usually first recruited by the local labour bureau near their village to work for a particular employer with no choice of work type or location. They would be placed in a job without prior training, perhaps in the casting section of a foundry even though it was highly dangerous, and would imitate what other workers were doing. The more resilient of these migrants would take about two weeks to get used to the arduous nature of this work, whilst others would struggle to deal with the burns and great heat of the fires and would be quickly weeded out and dismissed. As a migrant foundry worker related, "After about two months you get the hang of the job. But before that many people are sacked because they recoil from the fires."[42] Dismissal forced the migrant back on his home village from which he usually returned illegally to the city. This was known as `shooting straight` because he would now be blacklisted by the labour bureau, and would seek out a relative or `homeboy` to assist him with work possibilities and temporary accommodation. In the city he would live in fear of the law which stipulated that a migrant workseeker could only reside legally for three days (72 hours) without permission from the Bantu Local Affairs Commissioner's Office. Without possession of a passbook giving legal passage to reside in the city, the shadow of arrest and harassment from the authorities dogged all his movements. Even at night he was exposed to such raids conducted by the hated black municipal police, or`blackjacks`, who would storm into hostel dormitories shouting, swearing, and kicking, expelling half-dressed illegal migrants into the cold night air. As Paul Stewart, who wrote a biography of Makhoba explained, "The blackjacks are the mediating influence between the policies of the local authorities and the migrant labourers at whom these polices are directed."[43] - it is estimated that 17 and half million Africans were prosecuted under these pass laws between 1916 and 1981.[44] On finding new employment he would be contracted on an annual basis

travelling home every year at Christmas when his contract lapsed for a two week period, after which he would return to renew his contract, often with the same company at which he had worked for many years. Although dismissals were common, with `slow` and `cheeky` workers being weeded out, many of these workers had served long years in one company, in the foundries for example, 54 per cent of workers had worked in one company for over ten years. His work would entail long hours, and hard, badly remunerated, repetitive labour often involving overtime and Saturday work.

If he found a job without company hostel facilities he would register at the Bantu Local Affairs Commissioners Office and attain a single bed ticket to reside in a single sex hostel (owned by township Administration Boards) from the township superintendent's office. If his wife or family came to visit he would rent a shack in the location for a few weeks so he could stay with them. Hostel accommodation, where he shared a room with at times 16 other migrants, was often the only alternative because a room in the location was expensive and his wages small - in the region of R30 a week[45] including overtime, well below the Household Subsistence Level. The hostels were a focus of many grievances for workers, they were dirty, housing filthy broken toilets and wash facilities, noisy, and overcrowded which obviated any form of privacy, whilst stealing, drinking, fighting and violent assaults were a commonplace weekend phenomena. Makhoba observed of the Vosloosrus Hostel in 1980, "The last time the hostel was cleaned was when it was built [in 1963] ...There are absolutely no improvements in the hostel. Things are getting worse and the cause is there is no repairer. There is no person who represents people's grievances. The only person is the superintendent whose major concern is the money at the end of the month."[46] Despite these conditions, hostel fees were raised without consultation or improvements to facilities.[47]

Within the workplace migrants suffered the rigours of the apartheid workplace regime with its rigid racial hierarchy by virtue of which most skilled jobs were reserved for white and a few coloured and Asian artisans. It was a source of great bitterness that when a white worker entered the job for the first time, the migrant workers was often obliged to train him. As Makhoba remarked, "When he gets employed they say he knows the work. When he is inside the firm I teach him. That made me cry. I didn't get the money which he is getting, but am supposed to be his teacher."[48] In production migrant workers were often supervised by a black `baas[boss]-boy` or induna, universally hated by African workers for carrying out the white employers' dirty work. Makhoba commented on this detested form of authority, "If I were to hit him I would be breaking the law. When you hit the induna you lose your job. It's possible though that you can hit him in the night, provided nobody sees you."[49] Indunas in turn laboured under the authority of white foremen who constituted the first line of management. In this hierarchy African workers constituted a cheap labour force. Black hourly paid workers and white hourly paid workers existed on separate

payrolls with widely varying rates of pay and benefits. Racial categories were the basis for the division of labour and this permeated both the occupational structure of the workplace as well as its social structure. White and black workers had separate changing rooms, ate in racially segregated canteens with facilities varying accordingly, and were allocated separate toilets and washrooms, which up to 1983 was stipulated by law in the Factories Act (passed in 1928 and later amended to enforce workplace segregation) but which in reality continued in traditional practice for many years after the cessation of the Act.

The apartheid workplace meant that "power in the workplace was racially constituted"[50] rendering the factory a place of power for whites through workplace institutions and through their racially biased interaction with blacks. Conversely it was a place of disempowerment for blacks. White managements' preference for employing African migrants, as opposed to African urban workers, underlined both their insecurity in these power relations as well as their active promotion of African disempowerment for reasons of profit. They felt that contract workers were more obedient, loyal to the company, reliable, and worked harder than local people. They articulated their preference in this way: "They [migrants] aren't so free to change and are consequently more loyal and they stick with the job." and "Locals don't want this kind of work. Local labour is drunk and rebellious, and if they have a disagreement with you they pull out a knife and stab you, especially the young ones."[51] Another employer commented that it was easier to get homeland workers to do overtime as they often lived in the company's hostel. Employers might have been reluctant to employ local labour, but local labour was equally reluctant to take on the kinds of jobs that migrants were forced to entertain, "We contract people are different; we do the rough work while the location people do the easy work."[52] This reluctance by township dwellers to take on heavy, dirty work ironically gave unskilled migrant workers the little bargaining power they did have.

The power of whites in the workplace was often arbitrary and lines of managerial authority were not always clear to workers. Any white could issue an instruction whether it contradicted a previous instruction and whether it was directly workplace related or not. Blacks were seen as the servants of whites and being asked to wash the baas' (a subservient term used to address an employer) car over the weekend, or to wash his overalls, was considered well within the non-existent job description of the black worker. This `baaskap` (act of being a `baas`) was maintained through fear - fear of dismissal, verbal abuse, assault, reduction in wages, refusal to give an increase and so on. Subservience was rewarded (or might be), initiative and assertion punished. As a metal worker explained:

> Our employers don't treat us like human beings, but animals, because they know that as soon as they expel you, you would lose a place of residence, because you would not be able to pay for the hostel fees without the money which they provide. And the pass office is going to be indifferent and will instruct you to go back where you come from. That is

very painful.[53]

It was on this racially super-exploited group of migrants that Mawu focussed its organising initiatives in the 1970s and early 1980s. Over time it established a substantial basis of trust through its commitment to workers` control which enabled migrant members to experience a level of control not encountered elsewhere in their lives. At the time of the East Rand strike wave which erupted in 1981, 60 per cent of contract workers came from Lebowa and South Ndebele and the rest mainly from Kwa Zulu. At Scaw Metals, the largest metal factory on the East Rand, for example, the company employed about 3 000 migrant workers in 1980, which increased by the mid eighties to about 4 000. These migrants who resided in the company hostels came predominantly from Kwa Zulu, with the remainder coming from the Northern Transvaal Pietersburg area and from the Eastern Cape. Unskilled migrants constituted 70 per cent of the workforce, semi-skilled workers 20 per cent whilst white skilled artisans comprised the remaining 10 per cent.[54]

The union initially won the trust of migrant workers in company recognition struggles during the 1970s and early 1980s when it waged battles around migrant contracts and lack of work security, assisting members to resist the employer tactic of terminating, or refusing to renew, workers' contracts if they were suspected of being union activists. As an ex-Mawu unionist from the Highveld region recalls, "Slowly all workers got united. If they didn't renew a contract and workers knew it was victimisation they would unite to take action - it was almost like fighting a dismissal. We would go on strike if they didn't renew a workers contract."[55] Mawu defended workers against dismissals, and an important message that accompanied this was that the union was standing up for their humanity, their human rights. Numerous migrants explained, "I joined the union because workers are not treated like human beings by management." and "I joined the union because I was dismissed for being absent from work for three months. I had in fact been admitted to hospital where I was being treated for swollen feet caused by working in the furnace."[56]

In 1981 when the recession set in, it was Mawu's fight to retain migrant workers' jobs that further reinforced the loyalty of these workers to the union. Inevitably the scale of job losses focussed Mawu on the issue of job security and retrenchment. It fought some hard, but ultimately defensive battles, in attempts to address the issue. In 1982 the union initiated a campaign to negotiate retrenchment agreements in all its East Rand factories. Many companies were in the process of negotiating recognition agreements, and retrenchment procedures constituted an important part of such contracts. Negotiating retrenchment procedures was a complex matter. As Adler recalled, "The first retrenchment agreement that I was involved in we let slip an important definition regarding the transfer of workers inside the plant. We have to tighten up, it is not sufficient just to

talk about procedure in terms of last in first out. For example, we must talk about numbers to be retrenched, the amount of redundancy pay, recalling workers etc."[57] Naawu had paved the way, and Fosatu followed by drawing up retrenchment guidelines which Mawu endorsed. Step one was to win job security by demanding that the company freeze recruitment, train workers in new techniques or jobs, introduce a shorter working week, stop overtime, and grant unpaid leave to workers at different times. In addition the company was asked to engage shopstewards in discussions over redundancies to find other ways of cutting costs. Step two was implemented when retrenchments were inevitable. In this instance the union demanded adequate notice of retrenchment, usually a minimum of one month. The last in, first out system was insisted upon in order to prevent management from retrenching strong unionists. Efforts to negotiate adequate compensation were made including the payment of all outstanding leave and pension pay, and one month's wages for each year of service. Finally, companies were obliged to maintain lists of retrenchees so that they had first option on any future employment opportunities in the company.[58]

In 1982 Mawu members struck at least eleven times over retrenchments. Krost Brothers in Heriotdale, for example, announced they were retrenching 140 workers. Shopsteward, Elias Novela, said that when shopstewards raised the issue of severance pay "the managers just walked out of the room."[59] This prompted a four day stoppage by the entire workforce until the company agreed to negotiate retrenchment issues. At a factory in Port Elizabeth, Carborundum Universal, management attempted to outsource their security in an apparent cost-cutting exercise. Immediately prior to the company's decision Mawu had discovered that it was paying the guards for a 45 hour week, instead of a 60 hour week. After negotiations employers agreed to back-pay for the seven guards. The union was convinced that the sizeable back-payment was behind the retrenchments. A strike of 200 workers, however, changed the company's mind and the seven security guards were retained.[60]

In a number of cases Mawu successfully resorted to the Industrial Court to force consultation over redundancies, particularly in the early days of the Court's existence. Many companies settled before the case came to court. Deutz Diesel in Pietermarizburg, for example, refused to negotiate the retrenchment of five workers and it was only after Mawu instituted court proceedings that it settled at R6 500 severance pay and agreed to re-employ workers when vacancies arose. Geo Stott paid out R10 000 to retrenched workers in an out of court settlement, and Triple A Rubber at Prospecton near Durban paid out R2 500, and agreed to re-employ the 25 workers if vacancies became available after the union threatened legal action.[61]

A further basis of migrant deep trust and loyalty to their union was the way in which it fought hard for migrant group rights. Mawu through its federation, Fosatu, voiced strong opposition to a

government Bill arising out of the Wiehahn Commission's Report which recommended that migrant workers (termed `commuters` in the Bill) should be excluded from registered unions and registered unions should be fined R500 for each migrant member in their ranks. The emerging unions were aware of government's underlying divide and rule strategy whereby certain workers would be granted trade union rights and the right to reside in urban areas, whilst migrant workers would be forced back into homeland poverty obliging them to sell their labour as foreign visitors in South Africa's urban industrialised areas. Through Fosatu, Mawu and other emerging unions steadfastly refused to accept this clause and the state rapidly lost initiative. In 1979 it was forced to concede that migrant workers could legally join registered unions. It was campaigns of this kind, that engendered a deep commitment by migrant workers to their union, Mawu.[62]

Growth, legal reform and organisational responses

Tarrow asserts that, "People engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change and then, by strategically employing a repertoire of collective action, create new opportunities, which are used by others in the widening cycles of contention."[63] The Wiehahn reforms (embracing three Acts passed between 1979 and 1981) offered precisely this bridge of micro-political opportunities to which Tarrow refers. For migrants' these reforms catapulted them from their earlier profound vulnerability to dismissal and arbitrary behaviour, to a world of comparative dignity and security. The bridge was constructed in two phases. Firstly, state recognition diminished the fear that many Africans had felt about joining unions. Secondly, formal registration of African unions opened the way for signing recognition agreements, which even when they did not permit plant based bargaining over wages, entrenched protection against victimisation and arbitrary dismissal.

For the unions the new legislation allowed them to reveal themselves. No more recruiting behind bushes outside factories as 'Baba Kay' Makama described,[64] or in secret cells across company departments. Mawu now had the legal right openly to recruit and this legitimacy made it difficult for the state overtly to attack it. A shopsteward at Highveld Steel described how the union grew in his company in the early 1980s: "After Wiehahn it helped us a lot as it decriminalised things. I'd recruit a few and then the rest would play the wait and see game. Then I was lucky, someone was dismissed and these guys waited to see what the union would do. We went for the appeal and won, and the complainant got up and said: `If this company is going to be run by communists I don't want to be part of it.' After that the stop order forms were coming in left and right..."[65] According to Fanaroff, "Once the law changed employers suddenly thought they had to talk to us and that was a complete change. Employers for about a year weren't quite sure how to deal with us. Some of them went over the other way, they were so accommodating - after refusing to talk to us for years! It took about two years for them to realise they didn't have to say much to us then they reverted."[66]

Mawu immediately took advantage of this new organising space and made the strategic decision to focus on organising workers on the East Rand, the nub of the metal industry. When Moses Mayekiso, a fired worker leader from Toyota, became an organiser in 1979 the union sent him to two plants in Wadeville. Employer uncertainty, following the Wiehahn reforms, meant that Mawu could overtly organise large numbers of workers. It made the strategic decision to move away from the painstaking company by company recruitment of the 1970s and to move to mass organisation. It recognised the strategic importance of the municipal and company hostels to union work. Ironically, these hostels were designed as a control mechanism over the African migrant labour force, but the herding together of large numbers of metal workers provided concentrated sites for trade union educators and recruiters. The Vosloosrus hostel on the East Rand, for example, housed 15 000 men. A former inmate, Mandlenkosi Makhoba, a worker at Rely Precision Foundry in Boksburg, recalled how news of the unions spread,

> Life in the hostels is like living in a jail. Sometimes there are more than 20 people in one room ... the hostels are a good place to organise... The hostels have been good places to talk and learn about trade unions and the struggles in the factory. Meetings are easy to organise because everybody lives together. We live close to fellow workers of other factories. We share our experiences, and the victories and defeats in one factory become lessons for a large number of people.[67]

The decision in the Transvaal to move to mass recruitment in the hostels was triggered by both the new protection provided by the Wiehahn laws and also by the confluence of emerging inter-union competition in the region. In the early 1980s Saawu and Macwusa, the overtly political Eastern Cape general unions, arrived in the Transvaal. They staged huge, highly politicised, general meetings where workers from different factories were urged to join the union to fight off apartheid and their capitalist oppressors. This method of mass mobilisation was highly effective as thousands of workers joined these unions. Mawu was impressed with how they recruited members and spread the union message. Mawu was also scared of these unions. As Fanaroff recalled, "I was convinced the new unions would come up to the Transvaal and take our members. They organised through community meetings and I argued that we could do something similar."[68] Observing their tactics, Mawu went over to a mass organising campaign as Fanaroff again observes,

> At the beginning of the eighties we heard a rumour that Saawu was coming up to the Transvaal, so one day at Wilgespruit we decided we would out-organise Saawu using their tactics. So instead of using their tactic of mass rallies in the township and signing everyone up, we would move away from the factories where we always organised before, we'll stay factory based, but we'll now organise in the hostels. So Moss would tell workers he was coming to a Katlehong hostel and then organise everyone in that factory from the hostel. So Moss was one of the most powerful figures in the hostels - we really controlled the Vosloosrus hostels, Katlehong hostels, Daveyton, Wattville.[69]

The Transvaal branch of Mawu began by holding general meetings in Kwesine Hotel, but unlike Saawu and Macwusa's meetings, which were often attended by students and the unemployed, it

invited workers only. Eventually up to 9 000 workers were attending Mawu rallies on the East Rand.[70] In Durban, Mawu also decided to abandon its slow, factory by factory method of organisation, and to move to mass organisation. Here however, the union changed its strategy for a different reason. As Erwin commented, "We never feared them [the new unions], they looked far too much like us in the seventies."[71]

A further incentive to move to mass recruitment was the fear that when the government saw that the Wiehahn controls were not working, they would try and smash the unions as they had attempted to do in the mid 1970s. Mawu therefore needed to build quickly to increase its power to fight back. In the Transvaal Mayekiso initially made contact with migrant workers in the Kwesine hostel as a means of organising a range of different plants. He recalls, "We used to meet the guys outside the compound and explain to them about the union. We did this for three days and then the security guards dismissed us off the property. After that we went into the compound secretly and signed up people. I would visit them in their rooms and managed to get 600 members in this way."[72] Thereafter it became a pattern that migrants mainly did not join the union individually, but in groups, recruited by fellow workers at work or by other workers, or organisers in the hostels.

Mawu's new strategy was still rooted in the factories but now an emphasis was laid on organising large plants quickly. Organisers told workers that they could only raise demands with management when a majority of workers belonged to the union. This speeded up organisation, "We were going through factories of more than a thousand in a week." Erwin recalls.[73] The union's emphasis on building strong factory structures ensured that Mawu retained their membership - unlike the populist community unions, Saawu and Macwusa. As Mawu and Naawu grew, recruitment took on a life of its own, and organisers no longer had to engage in the slow careful recruitment work of the 1970s. Adler remembers,

> In the seventies we were more externally based, because we didn't have the internal organisation, people and contacts and we were fewer. So we would do a lot of work at the gates and off factory premises. In the eighties we were bigger and had more factories. You couldn't be at twenty factories on an afternoon to recruit, and the fear factor was less, and you had more organisation, and we'd get shopstewards to meet workers at home in the township, or pop along at lunchtime to the factory next door. That happened in Benoni industrial sites. It started to get a momentum of its own, that would occur at the level of disputes, you'd have someone to help so it started to be a lot more based in the factories.[74]

In order to make use of the official bargaining mechanisms provided for in the Wiehahn laws, unions were required to register with the Department of Labour. Registration offered unions, like Mawu, a difficult choice. If they registered they had to accept government restrictions, but if they did not, they faced recognition problems and would lose their right to utilise the official bargaining institutions, the industrial councils, where white unions for so many years had successfully improved their members' wages and conditions. Up to this point companies had remained

implacable in their refusal to acknowledge the emerging unions and frequently claimed that they could not recognise an unregistered union which had no standing in law. They persisted in promoting liaison and works committees even in the face of extensive opposition. By 1978 there were 2 600 liaison committees and over 300 works committees nationally.[75] It was this obduracy that was a major factor in Fosatu's decision to apply for union registration.

At first all emerging union were united. They would not submit to government control and they would not register; especially as the government was proposing to exclude migrant workers from the ambit of the law and to bar racially mixed unions. Six months later only one African union had applied for registration. The first sign of a changing stand however came when Fosatu affiliate, Numarwosa, successfully polled membership (including UAW African members) on a Numarwosa/UAW merger on the understanding that it would register if the minister gave it exemption to operate non-racially.[76] Thereafter Fosatu and its affiliates pressurised government by indicating that they would register provided all racial restrictions were removed. The government capitulated. This decision to permit non-racial registration broke the emerging unions' united front.[77]

A number of Cape unions continued vociferously to oppose registration. These included the African Food and Canning Workers Union, the Black Allied Workers Union, Saawu, Macwusa and most notably the Western Province General Workers Union (WPGWU). The WPGWU was influenced by Poulantzian theories concerning state power which were in currency at the time. Poulantzas argued against Marxists who viewed the state simply as an instrument of the ruling class. He contended that the capitalist class was too focused on individual short term profit to be able to exercise all of state power in its own interests. The ruling class was not sufficiently broad in its vision to maintain the class' power as a whole. Yet, although the state and capital operated relatively autonomously, the state provided sufficient stability in order for capitalism to reproduce itself. He further maintained, in Gramscian vein, that the state provided this stability through securing subordinate groups' consent using the mechanism of cross class alliances. The ruling class, such as in the case of the New Deal in the United States, by making concessions to labour were able to cement an alliance between labour and particular fractions of capital thus buttressing the continued existence of capitalism.[78] Likewise, the WPGWU opposed registration on the grounds that "…registration spells the death knell of workers' control of the unions…It involves… a series of compromises on the question of workers' control…having compromised on the question of workers' control, the unions will have lost the most important element of their power."[79] In order to maintain and strengthen democratic trade union practice it was necessary to maintain worker autonomy in the face of co-option by the state. Registration, WPGWU argued, would undermine workers' control by putting decision-making in the hands of union officials thereby

forcing them to operate in a bureaucratic and undemocratic manner. Moreover, it contended that participation in Industrial Councils would weaken the independent unions' bargaining strength because they were not sufficiently strong to outvote white minority unions. The `emerging unions`[80] power lay in strong workplace organisation where they had the capacity to strike and enforce agreements. In addition, it expressed concern about the powers of the Industrial Registrar who had the right to inspect unions to investigate allegations of unconstitutionality (in fact, as Fosatu pointed out, the Industrial Registrar could also investigate unregistered unions). For the Cape unions, Fosatu was too enmeshed in how registration would change employers' attitudes whereas they believed only worker power could force recognition on employers.[81] Unions did not require the government stamp of approval to use their power.

In turn, an article by Fine, de Clerq and Innes articulated the Fosatu position (although it was not officially endorsed by Fosatu). They argued that Fosatu's position expressed a different conception of the state. Unlike the Cape unions who viewed the state as "capable of adapting its methods of repression towards the labour force, but never of easing repression…the new legislation implies a fatal subordination to new forms of repression, to the power of the state"[82] they saw Fosatu as exposing "… the contradictions of state power" which was "as vital as the exposure of its repressiveness…the Wiehahn strategy … make it a high risk policy for the state." Further the Wiehahn Commission had been forced upon the state "by years of struggle by workers and their representative organisations and therefore these changes establish a new terrain of activity to which black workers and their unions must relate…the state's denial of trade union recognition to black workers over the past fifty odd years has been one of the most serious obstacles to their development…it would seem … the height of folly for the unions to turn their backs on these concessions." Fosatu believed that registration only weakened unions if they were not organised enough to resist control and that Numarwosa was registered and, as one of Fosatu's strongest affiliates, had lost none of its militancy. For Fosatu the new laws were a site of struggle. As Erwin argued, "I always thought Wiehahn would give us new openings. Registration and the other controls could not tie us up if we were strong in the factories. They needed blunter instruments to do that, and because they said they were reforming, they couldn't use them."[83] Fosatu agreed with the anti-registration argument that unions could not accept racially separated unions but argued that unions should offer to register, but refuse to enter the system unless they could recruit all races. Mawu organiser Mbanjwa recalls, "The question of registration went together with the whole question of co-option. That is why we took racism as a key issue because that was at the heart of apartheid. And if they could register us as non-racial unions then we would have broken them down on the question of co-option."[84]

Fosatu, with Mawu its largest affiliate, and Numarwosa/UAW firmly behind the decision, saw

registration as an issue of tactics and not of principle and decided to join the system. It argued that registration made it more difficult for employers to refuse union recognition on the grounds they were not registered and this would increase workers' bargaining power on the factory floor. Prior to 1977 the union had adopted a mixed strategy of demanding recognition whilst simultaneously taking up workplace grievances but lack of recognition often made grievance handling impossible. The survival strategy adopted by Mawu in this hostile environment after the union's collapse in 1976 involved therefore, a focus on building strong independent structures in a limited number of factories with the primary aim of winning recognition agreements which would entrench workers' rights and operate as platforms for further advances. It was against this strategy that unions evaluated the issue of registration, "according to its ability to facilitate or obstruct these goals."[85] The differences between the WPGWU and itself were fundamental. Fosatu believed these unions' stand lacked confidence and that official bargaining rights were a victory which although holding dangers also opened up enormous possibilities.[86]

Soon after Naawu's decision to register, Mawu submitted an application and stressed its commitment to non-racial organisation. The government's response was to provide Mawu with a registration certificate to represent African workers alone. The union appealed to the Natal Supreme Court which upheld its right to non-racial registration and thus overturned decades of racial registration. [87] The new law and the willingness of certain unions to register ironically helped the unregistered unions and rendered the differences between the two groups largely obsolete. Many employers who had previously used the argument that they could not deal with unregistered unions found themselves without a weapon and thus allowed unregistered unions to win factory rights. Furthermore the Volkswagen 1980 strike dramatically illustrated that registration had not tamed emerging registered unions.[88]

The Wiehahn laws and registration had the immediate effect of softening employers' attitude and resulted in a marked rise in the number of formal recognition agreements won by Naawu and Mawu. In September 1980 Mawu signed its first recognition agreement with Precision Tools. This was followed by signed agreements with Tensile Rubber and Henred Freuhauf in 1981. By 1984 of Mawu's 180 organised factories, 122 had signed recognition agreements. This was a considerable advance considering that employers often delayed recognition through the demand that unions attain a 50 +1 majority membership as the baseline for union recognition. Although an arduous task for unions the formula ironically forced them to conduct high powered recruitment campaigns which increased their numbers, democratic representivity and their power. By 1983 Naawu in the auto sector had organised 18 000 members and had won recognition in five out of nine auto companies with two further agreements imminent.[89] Of the 28 factories it had organised in auto, rubber and components it had won 27 recognition agreements by 1984.[90]

Two broad categories of recognition agreement emerged. Those enshrining collective bargaining over wages and those that did not. Auto recognition agreements embodied an understanding by both parties that Numarwosa, and later Naawu, as registered unions would negotiate wages through the Eastern Cape regional industrial council as their history had lent them an understanding of industry wide organisation together with `a sense of pragmatism and power not shared by the rest of the unions'.[91] This power lay largely in the fact that by 1982 Naawu represented a majority of auto workers in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area and could bargain from a position of strength on the council. In 1981 the auto and components industry employed 115,800 workers of whom seventy per cent were black and Naawu had organised forty per cent of these black workers.[92] Mawu however, pursued a policy of plant bargaining because it had neither the faith in these structures nor the membership numbers to wield power on the metal industrial council. Thus the negotiation of a recognition agreement often became a battle to include a clause which would permit the union to plant bargain wages. Many of its agreements did not permit in-plant bargaining in accordance with both the spirit of the Wiehahn laws and Seifsa directives which insisted that wage bargaining take place at industry level. Nonetheless, recognition agreements provided the union with some important rights: shopsteward recognition including time off in working hours to conduct union business; access to factories by union officials; stop order facilities; the introduction of dismissal and grievance procedures; plant bargaining on terms and conditions of employment with the right to report back to membership; and other important clauses such as retrenchment provisions. At the centre of these agreements was the representative role of the shopsteward which located factory power in the hands of union membership. In consequence these agreements advanced organisation and were a significant strategy for building union power in the workplace.

Recognition agreements as signed, binding contracts, gave the union permanent bargaining rights in the workplace which could be enforced in the law. This lent a particular power to disciplinary and grievance provisions in agreements which symbolised the struggle to regulate the arbitrary powers of management through negotiated codes and procedures. Employers were now obliged to adhere to a code of practice around dismissals which in most cases took the shape of a verbal warning issued by foreman for a first transgression, a written warning for a subsequent offence which could only be issued through a disciplinary enquiry chaired by a senior manager and which gave the `accused` worker the right of representation through a shopsteward and the right to call a witness. A further transgression for the same offence constituted the final warning and any further breach would lead to dismissal. Such procedures made arbitrary dismissal (and in some cases arbitrary retrenchment) difficult and went to the core of workers' most bitter grievance that of arbitrary dismissal when they were being rendered additionally vulnerable by an economic

recession. Agreements were not viewed as a substitute for factory floor organisation but as an additional weapon in the fight to humanise, democratise, and equalise the power relations in the workplace, as Fanaroff observed,

> I think it serves a purpose both psychologically and legally, because management is bound by certain rules. And at times when we are weak it serves as a defence because it becomes an accepted way of working. Where organisation is not developed sufficiently the document cannot be used effectively. You can't have a recognition agreement as a substitute for organisation. It has an important psychological effect for both workers and management. For workers it clarifies what they have won and they have the right to do and they tend to be confident in doing these things. For management it forms a basic level of what has been accepted.[93]

As previously mentioned the recognition agreement usually conferred the right to company check off facilities. This was a significant right considering that prior to the Wiehahn reforms, African employees were excluded in terms of the Bantu Labour Act (SA No 67 of 1964; Sec 16 (11) from the ICA (Section 51 (3)), which allowed for employers to check-off (or stop-order) deductions against the wages of employees in registered trade unions. In 1975 Mawu's monthly income was between R800 - R1 000 a month (Transvaal monthly income in the first six months of 1977 was R2 033) and little money was available to pay for organisers' salaries, rent and other organisational needs. As Kubheka remembers, "We didn't have an administrator in early 1976. Volunteer Wits [University of the Witwatersrand] students came in now and then to do typing and admin... There was no money so organisers did not have a fixed salary or wages. It would be `sorry this month we have no money'. The organisers were myself and Gavin in 1975 and '76. Our salary was supposed to be around R140 per month. Money came mainly from subscriptions."[94] Despite increased subscriptions in the early 1980s, donations from overseas worker organisations such as the IMF, and the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) were often crucial in keeping the union going. All union membership fees were hand collected - a huge and problematic task according to Fanaroff,

> We started organising in Brollo Africa in Elandsfontein - we didn't have an office so we organised out of my beetle... I used to go there on a Friday afternoon and Andrew Shabangu would bring me a couple of shoe boxes of cards and money... you had to catch workers as they left the factories, and I'd have to spend the whole weekend, every week, writing receipts for 600 members at Brollo for 20c for each person and stamp these cards. There was no admin back-up. Sometimes a volunteer would help me, like Glenda Webster. I was desperate that we should move to a monthly payment system. Finances were always major problems. Organisers were ripping off money...We could never balance books, receipt books would get lost. We used to give receipt books to shopstewards to take to the factory and collect, cards would get lost - it was a nightmare. Chasing shopstewards to bring receipt books back, why there were receipts missing. It was difficult, very few factories were paid up. Workers subscriptions often lapsed.[95]

As the number of recognition agreements combining stop-order provisions grew, and membership increased, so finances slowly improved. By 1984, 122 recognition agreements were signed and 20 000 members were on stop-order. This was huge relief for Fanaroff, "Once we had stop-orders we

became a lot more stable - it took ages to get on stop-orders, to get workers to sign and employers to agree to them. There were long debates about stop-orders - do they make you reformist? Getting stop orders was certainly one of the reasons for registration. I was so happy when I didn't have to write receipts and stamp cards."[96]

More money meant more staff to service the growing membership. In 1981 the union employed additional organisers and for the first time employed administrators. The Natal branch employed four organisers and one administrator and by 1983, the Transvaal branch had three organisers, one in Benoni, one in Springs, one in Pretoria and an administrator. By 1984 Mawu was bringing in about R 58 000 in subscriptions and its staff grew to 23 full-time officials. In 1985 Southern Natal, for example, had 9 000 members and nine organisers.[97] Up to this point organisers were general recruiters who worked across their regions; there were no local offices with local organisers. Now Mawu faced the problem of how to service large numbers of workers in many factories and the union began setting up local offices, operated by local organisers who serviced a particular area assisted by a local administrator. There was a move from simple to more complex organisation.

3. Growth and organisational approaches adopted

Introduction

Macun points out that union growth is a multifaceted phenomenon, there is no one factor that is responsible for growth nor is numerical growth an end in itself. In assessing the unions' growth in the 1980s organisational strength is one of the factors that has to be taken into account. For Mawu and Naawu it was crucial to maintain internal union cohesion during this time of expansion. This served both to ensure continued growth and to retain properly serviced current membership.

A central theme of this thesis is the goal of unions to acquire power - power in order to gain recognition, to negotiate over wages and working conditions, and to further advance worker rights. Organisational approaches are important in this regard because some advance union strength and some weaken them, "It is stabilisation and maintenance of organisation that will provide a key indicator of the strength of the union movement."[98] asserted unionist, Dave Lewis when discussing the effects of the recession in the early 1980s. Both Naawu, and particularly Mawu, were faced with questions of organisational coherence as their unions grew. Although issues presented themselves of how best to uphold workers' control, these unions adopted structures and developed strategies in response to conditions on the ground which had the effect of greatly strengthening their membership and of drawing in new members. Their attitudes to recruitment tactics, and to the attainment of basic rights in their factories through both registration and recognition agreements bears testimony to this. The coalescence of various forms of education, the

development of factory leadership and factory structures, and their innovative responses to capacity crises, all explored below, bears further testimony to the organisational power that these unions were able to harness.

Development of empowering structures

Shopstewards build factory power

There is a relationship between union growth and union structure. Strong democratic worker structures in the auto and metal factories, for example, allowed for "stabilisation and maintenance of organisation" which bolstered and empowered membership once initial recruitment had taken place. The Fosatu unions' decision to organise as industrial unions, rather than in the style of the closed artisan unions like Micwu which "are generally orientated to controlling the supply of labour and do so by focussing on entry barriers to jobs and union membership"[99], allowed for inclusion and maximum participation which attracted African workers who were voiceless and excluded from participation in the country of their birth. The unions that grew most rapidly in the 1980s were the open industrial unions which targeted African workers who had little control over their work life and whose skills were readily available and replaceable.

At the heart of this open style of unionism were the structures and principles that were laid down in 1970s and which provided a solid foundation to the national industrial unions that emerged into the 1980s. At the centre of these structures was the factory shopsteward structure. A Mawu booklet of the time portrayed shopstewards as the voice of democracy in the union,

> Each factory must be a school for democracy. The leaders are a voice in the factory: the workers are the union. The shopstewards are our leaders. And workers through their shopstewards must control the union. Leadership does not stop at the factory floor. It extends to the entire organisation. Trade union branches are controlled by a branch executive committee of shopstewards; our union as a whole by a national committee of shopstewards. [100]

As elected representatives, shopstewards serviced membership in multiple ways, but without workers' trust they could not survive. Their power lay in memberships' support. A Toyota worker described Moses Mayekiso in this way: "Moss [Mayekiso] was very popular with the workers and he had a lot of support on the factory floor. The workers, they trusted Moss because of the way he acted. He showed that he was for the workers."[101] Being trustworthy also meant being confident, fearless and holding a broadly acceptable political attitude, Richard Ntuli, a Mawu shopsteward in the early 1980s believed, "To be a trusted shopsteward I think you need to talk to a crowd well and I could do that. I hated this thing of apartheid and workers knew this, I told them this. Also I was not afraid to take things to management that workers asked me to take and to come and report back what management said."[102]. Members would remove shopstewards if they thought management

had `bought` them off. Workers struck for example in 1981 to demand the removal of a shopsteward from a foundry because he was believed to have become an `impimpi` [management spy].[103]

As Ntuli mentioned, an important role for shopstewards was to represent members to management which meant taking up workers' many grievances on a daily basis and setting up a stable, and on-going relationship with management. Mtutuzeli Tom, a Naawu Mercedes Benz (MBSA) shopsteward and later Numsa president, described the range of grievances shopstewards handled,

> The majority were about favouritism. Supervisors would upgrade guys because they were good at giving information about troublemakers. In those days you used to get promotion because you gave things to management, not because of your qualities, expertise. Also racism. We used to have right-wing supervisors using words like `kaffirs`,` baboons`. The other common grievance was theft accusations. Sometimes things were put into workers' lockers to try and get rid of those workers because they were a problem. Also issues around damage on the production line. We make cars. You fix your car and you let it go and then it goes to the next station and it's scratched. The worker at the next station is accused of damage to company property. Dismissals because workers were under the influence, was very common, because of the frustrations that workers were experiencing. It's not so common now. In olden days, workers were forced to work overtime. If they refused: `listen here, there are thousands outside the gates, if you don't want to work take your jackets and fuck off.` [104]

Often it was a struggle for shopstewards to develop a relationship with management, as former Naawu organiser Les Kettledas tells,

> The concept of the shop steward was still not understood. I can recall when Naawu organized at CDA, which is now Mercedes Benz, when we went to negotiate for shop stewards, the MD said:` Shop stewards? What are shop stewards?` We said: `No, those are people that are elected by other workers to represent them when they have problems.` He says: 'Problems? Workers with problems don't work in this factory!` So the concept of shop stewards had not really caught on, it was more like companies dealing with the leader of the union which was in this case the chair person.[105]

Shopstewards were informants and educators bringing the unions' policy decisions to members and educating them around their rights and the means by which they could defend themselves in the workplace, Moses Mayekiso, a former Mawu shopsteward and organiser recollects, "The shopstewards were bringing the message to the base. We used to work out how to present the ideology in simple terms and readable terms. Terms that workers understand, terms that were linked to what they were doing practically on the factory floor, what their living conditions were, and the exploitation of the bosses not providing houses and all sorts of things."[106] Part of the exercise of educating workers involved offering them the rare opportunity to express their ideas and feelings about their oppression at work. Mbuyi Ngwenda, a former Numsa general secretary, recalled his own experience when first joining the union,

> I was most impressed by the way the shopstewards conducted meetings where every individual had time to express their views. Even where there were different views the

> chair would encourage discussions and he'd say `every body has the right to talk`. And I learnt from talking to co-workers, and I had the privilege of talking to a shopsteward and president of Numsa, Daniel Dube, who explained the structure of the union and the concepts of accountability and mandate. He was an independent thinker...I learnt that you must respect different cultures in a union, that some of our members can't understand English or Afrikaans. Also I learnt that after meetings you must go out of your way to talk to workers who speak louder behind their machines - that's how you really get to know the feelings of workers.[107]

Shopstewards were the bulwark of the union in the factory. The shopstewards committee, where all shopstewards in a workplace or department came together to plan and discuss tactics, was the union's mobilising force in the workplace. Mawu along with other founder Fosatu unions entrenched these shopstewards committees in the constitution of the union, a new development in South African unionism. By 1980 these democratic shopsteward structures were fully empowered and on the East Rand officials no longer controlled the union. They now served elected worker leaders, as Friedman remarks, "The shopsteward meetings of 1981 were different ... [to meetings in the 1970s]: officials attended them, but said little."[108]

The unions' organisational strategies were important to their growth. The development of shopsteward leadership at local and national levels meant that there existed an army of recruiters on the ground, as well as a group of strategists in the National Executive Committee (NEC). The total identification with the union made shopstewards enormously effective and creative recruiters. A Numsa shopsteward spoke of how he recruited in a Barlow's company in 1982 where the South African Boilermakers, Iron and Steelworkers, Shipbuilders and Welders Society (SABS) had members. Boilermaker shopstewards were elected by management, union organisers discussed issues with management and not shopstewards, and no information was passed on to workers. He used Mawu T-shirts as a recruiting method because workers would come up and want to know what this union is on the T-shirt and then he would have the chance to explain what a truly representative union was and so recruit the worker and take them out of SABS.[109]

Emergence of shopstewards councils

One creative organisational innovation which was to contribute significantly to the growth of Mawu was an organic structure known as the shopsteward council. Such a structure had been mooted by Fosatu as early as 1976 in the wake of the 1976 Uprisings[110] and echoed Gramscian ideas of the coming together of factory councils composed of elected delegates from all industries in the area. Gramsci believed these area committees would become the "emanation of the whole working class" and as such be able to assume power spontaneously and to maintain sufficient discipline that would enable all work in an industrial area to come to a halt. In Turin such committees came to fruition and Gramsci applauded the increased militancy, and the impressive discipline which enabled them to bring 16 000 working men to a halt within five minutes.[111] These

formations appeared to answer Gramsci's question as to what kinds of structures of authority were appropriate to socialism and how they could embody everyday activity. Although probably not drawing directly from this source, union leadership would have been familiar with such Gramscian ideas. A Fosatu shopsteward council was initially established in Pietermaritzburg, where according to a *Fosatu Worker News* report in 1982, "It has discussed all major policy issues in the area for some time and has been responsible for much of Fosatu's growth."[112] It was on the East Rand in the Katlehong/Germiston/Wadeville area though, that it put down its strongest roots. The shopsteward council aimed to bring together stewards from different Fosatu factories across industries to discuss and develop strategies and to learn from each other. This structure operated outside the factories and outside of Fosatu or affiliate constitutions.

The Germiston shopsteward council, or as it was widely known, the Katlehong local, was developed in response to a capacity problem in the union whereby only one organiser, Moses Mayekiso, serviced the fastest growing union area in the country, and, according to a union organiser, was not coping, "The organiser can't go to all the factories. So we sat down and thought; let's change our strategy and give the job to shopstewards."[113] According to Fanaroff, "We heard about the shopsteward councils from Mawu's Natal branch and Moss began to build such a council in Wadeville."[114] The Katlehong Local was formed in April 1981 when there were three unionised factories in the area and where Henred Fruehauf alone was properly organised. The Local was also accessible to workers from factories in Wadeville (Germiston) and Alrode (Alberton) where there were numerous metal and engineering workplaces whose workers were mostly housed in the nearby townships of Katlehong, Natalspruit, and Vosloosrus. The Council met in the Fosatu offices on the outskirts of Katlehong, in a large bare hall at the back of a garage and shop called Morena Stores. This constituted a vital locale at a time when few spacious, sheltered and safe locations were available for township people to meet. Its main aim initially, according to Fanaroff, "...was to assist the union recruit members, to build union structures in the factory, and help with basic education about trade unionism."[115] Fanaroff refuted a claim made by academic Mark Swilling at the time, "...Mark Swilling said quite incorrectly that this was workers reacting to bureaucratic trade union organisers." and explained that,

> We took the decision that the way to organise was to get the workers to go out at lunchtime and organise all the other factories in the area and to help workers who were on strike because Moss couldn't do everything. That was where it started... It started with Henred (Fruehauf) who went through the whole process - battle liaison committee, strike etcetera. There was a chap called (Johnson) Nonjeke and Ramodile especially in the leadership there. They were very active and Moss used them as his organisers and that was the first local. A Henred worker owned a car which took shopstewards to other plants to recruit during lunch hour. [116]

Mayekiso too, sees this structure as emerging from the union rather than in opposition to union leadership,

> The locals were an organic development in the trade union movement. When we joined the union as Toyota, and then it became three factories in Wynberg and then there was a necessity for co-ordination. There was an office in Wynberg, but there was no local in the sense of basing it on shopstewards. We needed co-ordination around organising, support and solidarity so that we were a force, and so a local shopstewards council emerged with a local office to do our administration.[117]

The Katlehong local was immediately successful generating sub-committees to organise one street at a time which by the end of the year had brought in 23 factories with shopstewards representing 7 000 workers.[118] Shopstewards also started to move beyond the limits of the factories and began to educate on trains, in hostels, shebeens and in township meetings in order to recruit. Workers discussed articles in daily newspapers such as the *Rand Daily Mail*, and as Mawu organiser Dumisane Mbanjwa recalls, success in a plant was the greatest form of recruitment of all, "Once you achieved something in one plant, the plant next door a few kilometres down the road would hear about that. There would be a flow of communication between the two plants and then you would move in and organise that plant, and then the same thing would happen again."[119] In this way, Mawu created a powerful grassroots movement in the area and the Katlehong Local became the centre of working class activity over the following years. The council was open to all shopstewards of Fosatu affiliates in the area but of the eleven most active factories, only one was not in Mawu. There were no guidelines for sending representatives, well organised factories sent a whole group, and others sent one or two shopstewards, but attendance was good and about 90 shopstewards came to every meeting. Initially three shopsteward office bearers were elected, all from Mawu, but by 1982, four office bearer positions had been created of which two were occupied by Mawu and two by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). By then four Fosatu unions were active and present. Stewards from all unionised plants in the area met to plan action, and newly organised plants were at once included. The Local met every two weeks at 5.30 in the evening and in the week between meetings, the chairs of shopstewards committees held a planning meeting to discuss organising progress, to plan the next council meeting agenda, and to make emergency decisions between meetings.

The Local was divided into areas to keep track of recruiting drives, a process Richard Ntuli describes, "These area committees were strong. In Wadeville there were three or four factories in Wadeville south, and then there was Wadeville centre, and that was another area committee. They elected their own chair person and secretaries and they would report what happened at different companies..."[120]. Elias Monage[121], a former shopsteward at Don Products, remarked: "Recruiting was not an issue. Shopstewards would say this company is not organised. During lunch-time we would meet with people, often coming from one township. We'd start debating what was happening on the weekend, eventually you start discussing conditions of work. Then it was on the council agenda each week how many new people you had recruited."

An important role of the shopsteward council was to promote worker unity and solidarity across factories and industries. As an executive member explained: "We must have a Fosatu local like the shopstewards' councils to bring workers together, to make common decisions and to control what's happening in that certain area. Workers are encouraged to see beyond their own union to the struggle of the workers as a whole."[122] The shopsteward council was an enabling structure which allowed solidarity to develop organically because it brought workers from the same industry together - factories like Scaw came into contact with workers from Hendler & Hendler, and Salcast, and they compared workplace conditions and struggles. For the first time they began to strategise and draw up collective demands around broader issues affecting their industry such as how effectively to oppose the Metal Industrial Council agreement, and how to tackle the issue of unemployment. In 1982 retrenchment demands were adopted at Mawu's first joint shopsteward council, the Witwatersrand Shopsteward Council, which was attended by 230 stewards from 66 factories.[123] The Council accused employers of retrenching to extract greater productivity out of fewer workers, and urged companies to assign funds to keep workers in jobs during recessionary periods. They called on Seifsa employers to stop the inhumane job losses. Seifsa responded by drawing up guidelines for retrenchment procedures but did not believe that retrenchment was an issue for negotiation with the union. In response, shopstewards invited employers at all its plants to bargain a retrenchment agreement with them. Seifsa countered by advising members against this asserting that all negotiations should take place at the Industrial Council.[124]

Although shopstewards locals did not always achieve their aims they were a critical confidence booster as shopstewards learnt from mistakes and experiences in other factories. An organiser commented, "Even in factories where we didn't have success, the important gain is that workers learned that they have to struggle hard against the power of the employers to get what they want. And the employers learned that workers are no longer prepared to sit back whilst the employers are making decisions for them."[125]

The Katlehong Local was watched with excited interest by workers in other parts of the country and the idea rapidly spread: "Shopsteward councils are playing an increasingly important role in Fosatu." reported *Fosatu Worker News* in May 1982, "In many areas, they are taking the lead in organisational drives and are the main forums for discussing important policy issues." The Springs local was formed in August 1981.[126] The Pietermaritzburg branch already had a longstanding local, and other councils began to emerge in Benoni, Uitenhage, Brits, Pretoria, Elandsfontein, and in Richard's Bay where the councils carried out most of the organisation in the area before branches of individual Fosatu unions were formed. In the Eastern Cape, Naawu was not confronted with the same capacity problem as Mawu on the East Rand and elsewhere and it approached the question of

solidarity in a different way through general meetings and other structures which played, in effect, the same role as the shopsteward locals elsewhere in the country. As Kettledas outlines,

> The basis of our organisation was structured general meetings where there'd be a lot of discussion. We also had workshops and rallies where workers across industries came together under Fosatu to discuss matters and to run campaigns, like the living wage campaign. That helped build strong organization in the Eastern Cape...We did things at federation level across sectors. We decided on organizing campaigns, and collective bargaining campaigns, and we did our education and training at a federation level, rather than individual affiliate level. So that brought people together.[127]

The growth of the shopsteward movement through shopsteward councils led to further developments on the East Rand when different shopsteward councils in an area realised the benefits of getting together. As Ntuli recounts: "We had the Katlehong local based at Morena Stores and then in Elandsfontein headed by Andrew Zulu and Mr Makabela - they were key leaders, very good. During that time we started having some of our meetings on the trains from Wadeville to Kwesini and back and finish our discussions. Then we'd say: 'There's a big tree next to Elandsfontein Station meet there every afternoon when you knock off' and we'd meet."[128]

Mawu too, started to build new forms of shopsteward councils when shopstewards decided to bring particular sectors like foundry workers together, and to link up worker representatives from the same company in different parts of the country to exchange information, co-ordinate support, and conduct joint negotiations in what were called `combine committees`.[129] In 1982 shopstewards from Henred Freuhauf plants in Driehoek, Wadeville, Pinetown and Isithebe, all paid at different wage levels, set up a combine committee to co-ordinate the negotiation of wages across plants. In July the same year Mawu started to co-ordinate its Transvaal organisation through joint shopsteward council meetings. Shopstewards were taking the organising initiative and all its possibilities into their own hands and grasping the full potential of worker solidarity and working class power. As a Katlehong council member remarked, "We are faced with the problem of building solidarity amongst us. When we face a problem then they (the workers) must know it's a struggle, not an insurance that I just come, and I am helped. It's a long struggle. Then to give them that understanding - that they are a certain class ... that they have to fight ..."[130]

The Katlehong shopsteward council was a practical and creative response to an organisational problem but its effectiveness reverberated far beyond an ingenious way of dealing with a capacity problem. It was a revolution in union organisation, the councils were organs of workers' power. As Mayekiso explains, "The idea of the shopsteward council in Wadeville worked miracles. It allowed me to do my job more easily - that was to educate and conscientise workers... The shop-stewards council was very important for the union. It became the backbone of the union. The shopsteward council became the place where the workers could feel their power - the slogan an ` injury to one is an injury to all' became a reality there."[131]. For the first time workers were encountering a taste of

working class power both through a rapid increase in their numbers but also through mobilising, discussing, sharing, resolving problems, formulating tactics, and giving support and solidarity.

Education and Union Growth

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of educational interventions in the process of recruitment and of retaining membership in the early and mid-1980s. Education of membership unfolded in a host of rich and complex contexts. Some of this education was provided through formal union structures, but much of it occurred through more indirect and less didactic means. The pace, and power of this education was ultimately underpinned by the fact that workers were hungry to learn and seized knowledge as a direct means of informing and transforming their oppressive situation. Learning took place in the Gramscian manner of workers organically absorbing its relevance to their lives whilst it contained the potential of lending them the maturity to seize power.[132]

Tarrow has commented that contention takes many different forms which can be amongst others "inherited, rare, habitual or familiar, solitary or part of concerted campaigns." He notes that particular groups have a particular memory including the memory of contentious forms, "Workers know how to strike because generations of workers struck before them."[133] Bonin in her case study of how a collective 'struggle' consciousness evolved amongst BTR Sarmcol workers noted the educative power of the grassroots intellectual, or 'imbongi' (praise poet), by drawing on the Gramscian notion of an intellectual being any individual who deals with ideas. Grassroots intellectuals provided a bridge between the battles in the factory in the 1960s and later recruitment and recognition struggles in Mawu in the 1970s and 1980s. The imbongi, Lawrence Zondi, played the role of "sage, philosopher, poet, recorder and interpreter of history by consent of the rest of the community... and offered advice on the future."[134] He was the first to join Mawu at Sarmcol in 1974 and he drew in younger workers by "absorbing and intertwining individual experiences from the past with community experiences" and thereby welding "together a common history"[135] This continuity between the past and present was important in shaping younger workers' consciousness. Zondi, together with a number of older workers, imparted stories of strikes waged by the Rubber and Cable Union[136], a Sactu affiliate, where workers successfully won protective clothing and wage increases in 1961 following Sactu's 'pound a day' campaign.

Ruiters contends that on the East Rand, "The thread of continuity between the East Rand ANC activists of the 1950s and the radicals of the 1980s had withered. In the 1970s black consciousness ideas were on the rise attracting thousands of militants...the imprint of the 1950s was not discernable."[137] It is this thesis' contention however that the role of grassroots intellectuals at Sarmcol was not an isolated one. There are a number of recorded cases of younger workers being

influenced by the oral testimonies and experiences of older workers from the ANC/Sactu and PAC traditions. Ruiters would appear to be a victim of what Suttner calls,

> ...the paradigm that gripped academics in dealing with the post Rivonia period. It is the paradigm of an overwhelmingly powerful apartheid state, omnipresent and a shattered liberation movement. Silence is said to have reigned, quiescence, absence of ANC, political dormancy. The reality is that not everyone went to jail who was ANC. There were all sorts of ways that people bore the message of ANC, even in warning kids not to go the way of Mandela. From the early '70s large numbers of political prisoners returned with concrete mandates to spread ANC and create structures. People like Ma Sisulu in Soweto immediately started building underground structures. ..that the paradigm that prevailed, looked for visible evidence of continuity. The rupture was visible, but the continuity had to be more or less invisible because of the conditions of the time.[138]

Some workers passed on traditions and memories of struggle in their role as praise poets, such as Lawrence Zondi, and Alfred Qabula at Dunlop Sydney Road in Natal, whilst others informally passed on their Sactu organising experiences to younger workers in factories where they laboured. In some cases these were powerful learning experiences as Sipho Kubheka recalls, "I met a very interesting guy at the factory [Immextra House where he worked as a clerk]. He had done ten years on Robben Island. He was a member of the SA Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). He started introducing labour politics to a few of us...When he introduced us to labour politics he started with the activities of Sactu ....We did not have anything to look at as a mirror, except the oral history that Manci had given us... we were introduced by Manci to the Industrial Aid Society..."[139] A number of Industrial Aid Society workers were ANC or Sactu members such as Pindile Mfeka, Jeanette Curtis, and Joe Gqabi. Kubheka also recalls township political education sessions where the politics of the liberation movements and their labour wings was discussed in the 1970s. Peet Pheku, a worker at Heckitt and later a Mawu/Numsa organiser in the 1970s and 1980s, had been a member of a Sactu textile union and he recalled the terror of a police attack on strikers at Amato in Benoni in 1958, "... there was a big strike there so I was scared since then to join a union. I was a member of Sactu. The police came in and beat people up and after the police left I went with a friend and we found trousers on top of the fence, shoes of people, people just fled..."[140] He nevertheless sought out the IAS offices and began organising Heckitt and Iscor workers for Mawu where he imparted and drew upon his previous knowledge of trade unionism. Petrus Tom who established the Vaal branch of Mawu had been a Sactu member, and Baba Kay (Nehemia) Makama an organiser with Mawu and Numsa through the 1970s and 1980s had also been a Sactu/ANC member. At Volkswagen, as previously mentioned, older African workers who held allegiances to the ANC and PAC were important influences in the unionisation of African workers in the factory and in bringing coloured and African workers together in the same union. It would be a mistake however to assume that such influences were common to all metal factories. Many young workers of the 1976 generation had grown up under the influence of the black consciousness movement which was most prevalent in black student and intellectual circles and

which made limited overtures into black trade unionism. Other workers, such as future Numsa president Daniel Dube, noted having no previous contact with unions or politics, or with people who had been involved in such activities in the past and entered the unions as a result of recruitment efforts by Mawu or Naawu in the factories. It should be noted however that a number of migrant workers may have had knowledge of rural resistance movements earlier in the century which would have been conveyed through the generations via various oral traditions.

Experiential learning was also taking place continually amongst workers, shopstewards and organisers and was a powerful, widespread and immediate means of educating workers. The process of assessing tactics, evaluating failures, accruing relevant information, debating future moves was continuous and occurred between organisers and national office bearers, between organisers and shopstewards, between shopstewards on the shopstewards committee, and between shopstewards and membership in factory general meetings. Organisers were an important locus of experiential learning. Through the discussion of particular disputes and tactics to adopt with shopstewards and workers in a factory, numerous organisers testified[141] to being important disseminators of information both of a legal, economic, strategic and technical nature and also as conveyors of experiences undergone in other workplaces. This process of experiential learning was taken to new heights with the evolution of the shopstewards councils where, as previously described, shopstewards engaged in vibrant debate and discussion on factory problems, and later on community and political issues. The educative power of these structures was acknowledged by shopstewards when a decision was made to partially formalise this role through the appointment of an Education Secretary to co-ordinate education in the Councils.[142]

These organic means of developing and accruing knowledge were accompanied by more formal education sessions provided initially by Fosatu and later by the unions themselves. The input in the early 1980s provided by Fosatu had the goal of creating a `tight federation` which would provide a unified organising approach and vision in opposition to the style employed by the ‘community ‘ general unions such as Saawu, Gawu, and Macwusa. This education was highly practical in nature and aimed to impart important leadership and trade union skills which could be directly deployed in the factories. Initially a working committee dealt with education issues, but a lack of overall planning and structure in education led to the establishment of the Fosatu National Education Committee (Nedcom) and Regional Education Committees (Redcoms) in 1980. These committees, consisting of one worker and one organiser from each union, guided a full-time National Education Officer who was accountable to the education sub-committee of the Fosatu Central Committee.[143] Fosatu provided education to all affiliates frequently through seminars and group meetings. Alec Erwin, for example, who was appointed Fosatu National Education Officer in 1983 prepared course material, ran education projects and co-ordinated seminars across regions

sometimes with the assistance of externally based intellectuals and specialists from the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Natal (Durban). These courses were conducted for both shopstewards and organisers. Organiser courses covered such areas as the history of worker organisation, trade unionism and the law, and organising and bargaining practices. Regions conducted courses and seminars for organisers, office bearers, shopstewards, and importantly for general membership.[144] Joseph Meso, a former Mawu member and Samancor shopsteward, recalls the nature of this education, "It was basic. We discussed topics like what is a union, what are shopstewards, procedures to follow for taking cases, grievance procedures and negotiating skills. Halton Cheadle, they were lecturing us, as well as Peter Harris, Eddie Webster. We studied at night as well, travelling back from Jo'burg to the Vaal."[145] Naawu also made use of Fosatu education and Daniel Dube recalls the approach which focussed on direct factory improvements as a way of bringing workers into the union and keeping them there,

> We would have a basic trade union education which would mainly address what is the trade union, where does it come from, how can you build it inside the plant. Using daily issues like a worker coming in under the influence, and the foreman wanting to either dismiss him or to give him another penalty, and you coming in to argue in favour of the worker. And the idea there is to gain the confidence of the workers first, so that they can start listening to you. And then you can start teaching them other things.
>
> Number two: it was to teach people how the trade union organisation can be used to defend the interests of not only the working people, but also the working class. How to come up with policies that will not benefit only the guy who is working inside the factory of Volkswagen, SKF or General Tyre. But to come up with policies that would benefit all workers.
>
> In those days, a worker inside the plant would understand that this is an organisation that is there for his or her interests... What is of paramount to them, it is the working conditions in their plant. And if you can start improving those, they will get confidence in you or your organisation. Then you can start talking to them about the broader issues like what can we do for our community; what can we do for the unemployed. If you start from what can we do for the unemployed, they will say to you: `Hey! I haven't got food for my children tonight, and you are still talking about the other guys.` And you wouldn't be very successful.[146]

By the mid eighties unions were conducting some of their own education and although it covered similar basic shopstewards skills previously covered by Fosatu, was less formal in nature. The impact of the free-flowing discussion in shopsteward councils had been felt in union structures and a confluence of formal input and vibrant, open-ended discussion was more in evidence. Adrienne Bird was appointed a Mawu Transvaal Educator in 1985 and Taffy Adler Naawu's Education Secretary. Bird tells this story of the hunger for relevant education when running Transvaal shopstewards courses in Mawu,

> They were bizarre events. You would phone up the companies and get four or five per company, but because there were so many companies and so few of us, you'd pack people in. You'd have three or four hundred shopstewards trying to run some kind of learning in that... We used to have some quite good debates, but they were all in these vast general

> meetings, but people were doing them because they were desperate for information and desperate for any kind of help that would help them with the battles they were fighting in the factories.
>
> They were usually three or four days. We used to run them in the Germiston office where the alleyways always smelt of dagga and urine. It was all very basic and you took your life in your hands to go to the toilets! Very crude conditions, and mostly we had benches, people sat in these great lines of benches, and then there weren't enough so people would be sitting around on cupboards.[147]

This hunger for pertinent input and discussion partly explains shopstewards willingness to engage in an innovative development in the education programme known as 'siyalalas' (literally `we sleep`). Here delegates to union seminars would continue sessions throughout the night. These evolved partly in response to a lack of late night public transport, and partly because workers had limited time to engage in educational activities as time-off from work to attend shopstewards training was scarce. Such sessions were participated in with huge commitment, enjoyment and large amounts of technical and open-ended learning. Monage recalls, "We would call a siyalala and meet at the office on Friday night after work. We would talk all night, and they were well attended. The debate, the manner in which people conducted themselves was good. People were committed to this union."[148]

Ginsburg describes formal union education programmes as being of a technical character involved with directly imparting skills and of a political nature. He sees these formal education programmes delivered by white professional intellectuals, unlike other forms of learning, as being contested in Mawu by a group of organic black intellectuals in its leadership.[149] Whilst he is correct to view the political input as being under contestation, he fails to underscore the fact that large parts of this formal input were not under contestation and were characterised by a notable consensus. In his concern to highlight areas of dissension he misses an important strategic goal underlying the input of technical skills and information. Union leadership used the success of its strong factory floor efforts as an important organising and recruitment tool. The union was concerned to deliver improvements at factory level as both an end in itself and as an organisational tool which would bring in and sustain new membership and enlarge the organised working class. Delivery on the factory floor was thus of central importance in its strategic vision and in order to deliver improved workers' rights and wages shopstewards and organisers had to be empowered with the practical means to do this. Politics or inherited knowledge alone were not sufficient to grow the union. It was this agreement on certain basic aims and modes of operation between white professional and black organic intellectuals that gave the process of unionisation considerable power. There was agreement, for example, on such basic principles as workers control, strong factory floor organisation under the leadership of shopstewards, and although at times contested, a basic agreement on the need to observe a low-profile strategy so that organising initiatives did not attract

the heavy hand of the state. Even Kubheka who was a strong critic of the white intellectual anti-populist ANC/Sactu position that was promoted in Mawu, felt comfortable with the way the union approached the organisation of factories and acknowledged that the low political profile had beneficial spin-offs. "I must say that the comrades did a lot of good work under the circumstances. By drawing a line between labour and politics, for a period, the state did not closely watch and interfere with those people...That period gave comrades time to build very strong structures which were later instrumental in creating the period which we have today."[150] Ginsburg by focussing almost exclusively on the political content of this union education neglects the equally important aspects of organisational and collective bargaining approaches where there was a high degree of consensus and which was to render these unions, and Numsa, such a powerful force in the industry. He also misses the unifying effects of such education sessions where shopstewards from different factories were brought together to discuss tactics to be used in confrontations with management. Bird has observed shopstewards' keenness to acquire such knowledge despite reservations they may or may not have had concerning the political content, "... many of the shopstewards just wanted to learn all kinds of things and they didn't seem as worried as the black intellectuals were. Yeah, you could help, you were prepared to sit down and talk to them about how they solved an unfair dismissal, that to them was an immensely useful thing to do."[151] Kubheka too acknowledged that this contestation did not necessarily have any depth into factory structures at the time, "The debates were held between ourselves who were in the offices, and the students and some of the lecturers."[152]

An important extension of this formal education was the union's media output. The content of such publications as *Fosatu Worker News, Umbiko we Mawu, South African Metalworker,* and *Naawu News* which imparted news around the unions' activities countrywide and simultaneously educated workers on the unions' policies, labour laws, union and federation campaigns, and international working class struggles. These publications reflected the leadership's caution on overt engagement with liberation and anti-apartheid politics but also held the ideological goal of allowing workers to identify with a large national working class movement. The frequency with which such newspapers were published, and their concern to communicate effectively through a focus on accessibility to low literate workers, rendered them important educative tools. Both Mawu and Naawu also made effective use of the press to inform the public of workers' grievances especially during disputes. It employed the media as a tool to keep existent membership informed and to communicate to potential membership that they were active and committed unions. These unions also effectively encouraged and promoted working class culture as an educative and unifying weapon. There are numerous examples of such activities from the staging of workers' culture days at the University of the Witwatersrand; to the active promotion of workers' choirs including the production of vinyls and audio cassettes for sale; to the promotion of workers' theatre workshops

and plays which were performed around the country, and in the case of "The Long March" overseas, to publicise and elicit solidarity for disputes and campaigns; to the active promotion of workers' writings which in some cases resulted in the production of books of workers' poetry and narratives of their life stories and struggles. The unions also produced booklets on a variety of topics to inform and educate workers whilst the production of pamphlets briefing workers and their communities on disputes, boycotts, and other struggles was an on-going process. These unions took the task of creating a hegemonic working class movement extremely seriously in the broadest Gramscian sense and through their efforts created a powerful sense of belonging in metalworkers.

Importantly for the relevance of this education to union growth and retention of membership, was the fact that education was directly linked to organisation, and organising campaigns. This dynamic relationship made educational inputs hugely relevant for shopstewards and organisers and the separation of these functions was to emerge as a constant challenge and tension in Numsa's later educational efforts. Bird talks about this tension and the reasons for the later separation,

> In the early days education and organising were just the same thing, undifferentiated, when you went to the factory gates you did both, and you did one through the other...
>
> There was this sense that `alright we've organised and we've got committees all over the place, and they've got this thin understanding, can you make it deeper.` And that's the time when they started to appoint education officers. And so there started to become the split between organising and education. And always the further it got away from organising, the more the relationships became an issue...you should be deepening and helping to build organisation in general...But there were always problems about if there's conflict between education and organising, the education one would fall away... every time there was conflict education suffered. So there's the feeling that we'll create more distance, and then we'll be able to have a decent education programme. It won't get cancelled every time there's another meeting that's called.[153]

The confluence of these different learning experiences in the early 1980s was to have a dynamic effect on the growth of the unions. Inherited knowledge or prior experience of struggle, debate in union structures such as shopsteward councils and factory general meetings, discussions with organisers, and debate through informal worker networks were all to have a profound effect on the recruitment of new workers. The formal education provided by Fosatu and individual unions also played an important part in strategising recruitment methods and in ensuring the retention of membership through the application of skills and knowledge in the factory which enabled stewards to win individual and collective disputes. Major policy decisions in the union, such as the decision to register, which was to be crucial in the union's growth, were preceded by NEC and other education meetings. Combinedly these educational forms ensured the loyalty and long term commitment to the aims of these unions and thus contributed to their power. In order "to exercise power", Mawu organiser and later Numsa general secretary, Enoch Godongwana, believed, "you have to understand the issues."[154]

4. Building national industrial unity

Introduction

"Our union organises mostly metal workers ... This has made it easier to assist our workers efficiently with problems they face in the metal industry" explained a Mawu booklet, "At the same time our union does not believe in encouraging workers to become splintered in their organisations. That is why our union has always tried to work in close co-operation with other industrial unions which share our principles and to fight for broader working class unity."[155] From the inception of the independent trade unions in the early 1970s, through the co-ordinating body of Tuacc in Natal, there was a vision of strong industrial unions where a national worker unity, and worker identity, could be forged. The next decade saw the emergence of a wide range of unions, both industrial and general, unfolding alongside previously established industrial unions of a racially exclusive nature. It was the highly fragmented nature of the trade union movement that led the Tuacc (and later Fosatu unionists) to focus on the issue of trade union unity within industrial sectors. The emergence of monopolies meant that many workers in different parts of the country fell under the same ownership and in addition, were increasingly linked through the interconnected nature of production. Bringing workers together in large industrial unions meant uniting employees who were racially, ethically, and regionally divided including across urban and rural areas and Bantustans. The organisation, and communication, of workers across the country within one industrial union was intended to have the effect of restricting employers' ability to exploit racial and regional differences in wages and working conditions. Moreover, large numbers of workers organised into one union in the metal sector would create a power bloc which employers would be unable to ignore. Strike action across organised factories in the auto sector, for example, could immobilise the industry, force concessions from employers, and ultimately enable the union to engage on issues of industrial restructuring. It was for these reasons that the Fosatu unions adopted trade union unity as a central policy of the federation at its launching Congress in 1979.

National industrial union in auto

The launch of Fosatu served to strengthen workers in organised trade unions and to draw unorganised workers into its industrial affiliates. In addition the federation was better placed to take up non-factory issues at both local and national levels. It was a tight federation which provided a number of common resources to its affiliates and actively assisted them in accruing membership. Regional councils were established to ensure inter-union co-operation, and unions were frequently located in the same local buildings. According to Fanaroff, "We used to share organisers. The Fosatu secretary in each region was the organiser of last resort…it was share and share alike, we shared photocopiers, benches, desks, cars, organising, strikes."[156] Fosatu gave workers a concrete vision of unity in action, and it provided a model for future unity moves.

Numarwosa, the primary inspiration for the formation of Fosatu, was the first union to embark on industrial union unity. When Numarwosa established its parallel union, UAW, their aim was to organise Africans until the new union was sufficiently strong to merge with them. Moreover in the Western Cape, WPMawu was also coming to the realisation that its only means of survival was to unite with the Eastern Cape auto unions - a merger that had long been in the offing. The three unions had been thrown together in the talks leading up to the formation of Fosatu and had all taken part in the South African Council of the IMF where their common opposition to the racist Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU), had brought them closer together.

The IMF council had been formed in 1974 and brought together five emerging unions and five CMBU craft unions. The CMBU unions were in command; they alone had official bargaining rights and links with IMF leaders who in 1972 supported racially-defined parallel unions. There was however little basis for co-operation. Mawu and Naawu hoped that the established unions would use their bargaining rights on the industrial council to assist them in disputes. They asked them to intervene in lock-outs and strikes at both Heinemann (1976) and Eveready (1978) but they instead sided with management and government. After Eveready, Numarwosa's Fred Sauls walked out of the IMF meeting and other emerging unions joined him. In 1980, the Fosatu unions left the council charging them with practising segregation by organising Africans into separate parallel unions with little power to affect union policy. They further claimed that the IMF council enabled these racist unions to claim overseas that they were working with African emerging unions. Two years later Fosatu drew up conditions for participation in the IMF Council including "genuine shopfloor co-operation"[157] which was necessary if unions were to work together. On Fosatu's request the IMF expelled the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Electrical Workers Association and gave two other CMBU unions (one coloured, one white) a year "to remove apartheid"[158] from their organisations or leave. In 1984 the Council was revived on the emerging unions' terms and SABS was the only established union willing to work with emerging rivals quitting Tucsa to do so. Two other Tucsa unions, Micwu and Engineering Industrial Workers (EIWU) union, later moved closer to this grouping. The new council had nine metal and motor union members who belonged to Cusa, Fosatu and Tucsa representing 200 000 metal workers (Micwu later became the tenth member). The unions immediately took a resolution condemning poverty wages, influx control and apartheid.[159]

Struggles on the IMF Council consolidated Numarwosa and WPMawu's relationship and a merger of Numarwosa, UAW, and WPMawu took place in October 1981 uniting to form the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (Naawu). The new union numbered 17 000 members in Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, East London and Port Elizabeth. It was the first truly national industrial union within the emerging union movement. Naawu immediately registered with the

Department of Labour bringing the African `UAW part` of Naawu, with about 5 000 members, officially on board for the first time. The Tucsa tradition of registered trade unions gave Naawu a different character from unions like Mawu who did not share this history. As Adler explains,

> Naawu was more organised bureaucratically than Mawu partly because of the Tucsa tradition. At one point the union had uniforms for women who worked in the offices in PE [Port Elizabeth]. There was a level of organisational capacity which was admirable...there was a management committee at the provincial and national level where issues were discussed - so it was a more well-organised operation. There were definite lines of authority and responsibility - national exec, national office bearers committee, reports that went out, financial reports, records of decisions taken. You knew there was someone in control who recognised and exerted that authority and that was based in PE at the time.[160]

Gavin Hartford, a Naawu and later Numsa organiser, recalls the personal service that Naawu provided to individual members in the Tucsa tradition of administering benefits. He also recalls the professionalism of Naawu's seasoned organisers. These were services that Mawu was never able to provide,

> We were going once in the car with Les to the airport in between two strikes and he popped out of the car and went to the deeds office to process a deceased workers/ members estate. That was the kind of service they provided. They saw the worker through from the cradle to the grave. That's an amazing service to ordinary people. When the member died the family would come and say, `Uncle Les has detailed knowledge, he'll know what do we do now.' 'Oh we must wrap up the estate and register it and see what's due to you". That was their tradition.
>
> They knew the Basic Conditions of Employment Act backwards. They knew the estate law, the LRA, the constitution of the Industrial Council, they knew the minutes of every meeting, they knew the agreement backwards. This was the Tucsa tradition. That's all you did if you were a union official in Tucsa. You were a bureaucrat, you knew your documents. They knew it and they knew how to use it, and you always had the government gazette and you always read it. You worked very closely with the Department of Labour. Never mind the registration debate at the time, the Department was your ally and you knew the Department officials.[161]

In the early days UAW and Numarwosa collected membership subscriptions by hand in the same tedious way that Mawu did, the only difference being the presence of administrators, a process described here by Kettledas, "You have to issue receipts as you collect subscriptions every week, at the gate. Then on Monday morning you have to start reconciling - giving the receipt books to the administrators in the office to write up, to fill in the record cards of each of those workers." Later, he describes, what happened when the union started to win company recognition: "... the signed stop orders, we sent it to the company, and most of them wanted to do a verification... Then you had to negotiate with the companies again to give you a schedule at the end of every month setting out how much they have deducted from each member." This meant the union had more resources than Mawu - which was also a much larger union and was at this point unregistered and battling to win company recognition. Every Naawu official had a car, for example, whereas in 1984, 23

Mawu officials shared four vehicles. Naawu tried not to rely on outside funding. As Kettledas observes, "We always endeavoured to be self-sufficient as much as we were able to be, and only sought financial assistance on specific projects like when we wanted to start a new organising initiative in the Transvaal. Then we'd work out what funding would be required and ask the IMF to fund that... We only got funding for a project, not general funding to pay salaries of officials and so on." Registration encouraged Naawu and its predecessors to maintain tight financial and administrative procedures and the new union was generally in a sound financial shape according to Kettledas,

> ... we had to keep proper records in terms of the Act [Industrial Conciliation Act]. We had to have our books audited and submit our audited statement to the Department of Labour. We were also running benefit schemes, and it was important we have accurate records... There had to be income and expenditure statements for both the unions and the funds on a monthly basis, presented to the branch executive committee. And we had very strict treasurers. Treasurer at branch level, treasurer at regional level, treasurer at national level.. And a finance committee which had to meet regularly. We had branch quarterly general meetings and the membership were quite vigilant... You could get very detailed questions, from the floor, on your financial statements... I can remember that people were very nervous when it comes to branch general meetings...We just kept our head above water in various ways. I can recall that for four years all staff of the union never received a salary increase, because we just could not afford an increase... and we accepted that. I started with R250 a month in 1974, and by 1980 I was earning about R750.[162]

Naawu's formation was a positive example of union unity but there were instances in this period of the fragmentation of unions in the metal sector. The formation of a new union in the auto sector in response to Numarwosa's handling of the Ford strike in 1979 has already been charted, whilst internal dissent in Mawu's Transvaal branch resulted in a split in 1984 which although not severe in terms of numbers of workers and factories lost by Mawu (6 out of approximately 40 factories in the branch), reverberated for some time to come within the union and on the political and organisational terrain. The reasons for the split were complex following accusations of abuse of union funds on the one side headed by Moses Mayekiso; and political conservatism, lack of workers' control and domination by white intellectuals on the other side fronted by David Sebabi, Mawu's general secretary. Members of the latter faction were ultimately expelled from Mawu in June 1984, and immediately launched a new union, the United Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of SA (Ummawusa). (The split is explored in a later chapter)

At the Ummawusa launch Sam Ntuli (former Mawu organiser) claimed that, "Mawu is experiencing its final death.",[163] but rhetoric notwithstanding, he was mistaken. Mawu survived to grow and strengthen as many Ummawusa members returned to Mawu over time. At a BEC in July the same year Mayekiso was elected Transvaal Branch Secretary which at the time embraced Northern Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal, Highveld, and the Wits region. Sebabi did not survive in Ummawusa for long[164] although the union continued to operate and Elias Monage contended that

Mawu came out best in the dispute because: "You are not going to win workers to join a new formed union purely on a political ticket. You will win them on the basis of what you are doing, wages, working conditions. That was the unconscious decision that Mawu took. Even in the local itself, the Ummawusa guys realised that they were wasting time arguing with us. Even new recruits were confident with us..."[165] Indeed, Erwin reflecting back on the organisational cohesion of Mawu sees the lack of serious splits within the metal unions of the time as a testimony to their organisational strength:

> In fact there were very few splits or open conflict in Numsa basically because of its strong union base with the recognition that at the end of the day power gets built by organisation and not by talking, so the organisational imperative of marshalling your forces overrode your immediate interests and divisions and I think that's the great strength of all the old Fosatu unions which by an large allowed them to create a high degree of unity under very difficult circumstances. [166]

The schism forced Mawu to move its head office to Johannesburg which was a set back at the time but, in retrospect strengthened the union by forcing it to set up improved administration systems. Kosi Matlala, who was employed as an administrator in this new office, recalls this change,

> I was asked by the Mayekiso part of the split to help out with administration because the Sebabi faction had all the records and everything. The head office used to be in Benoni but around the time of the split we moved to Johannesburg. I used to stay late doing Moss' typing. There was no administrator at the time, everything was just chaotic....We were in Harrister House and it was just a big hall. And I had to start afresh - everything - setting up systems, finances were in tatters also, there were no financial systems... I went to the bank to set up salaries, UIF, and filing systems."[167]

National industrial union in metal

Soon after the split, both Mawu and Naawu took part in one of the most significant acts of worker unity in the labour movement of the time. This was the launch of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in 1985. Initiatives to widen and strengthen ties between the independent unions began in August 1981at Langa in Cape Town, two years after the formation of Fosatu. At subsequent meetings the idea of forming a new federation was advanced and the basis for co-operation and the underlying differences or similarities between unions and union groupings were explored. The road leading to Cosatu's launch was turbulent but both Mawu and Naawu played a constructive role in a process which took several years to come to fruition. Erwin recalls,

> At times debates were very hostile with the more populist unions, but in the formation of Cosatu an important turning point was, and Fred Sauls must get the credit for this, where Fosatu was close to breaking out of unity discussions. Sauls pointed out on the national executive that the cost of doing that is very high because the other unions represented political aspirations that were very powerful, and very real, and that although we might be differing about certain political and policy issues that is a lesser goal than the longer term objective of building a powerful union movement. And that was only going to happen if we could come to terms with these groupings that are more politically orientated than union organisation orientated. [168]

After long, and sometimes acrimonious debate, the unions reached agreement on most issues -

except the issue of non-racism which for Fosatu unions was one of their founding principles. The Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa), which had grown out of the black consciousness movement, withdrew from unity talks[169] when Fosatu unions refused to budge on this principle. Cusa's largest affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), stayed on to become part of Cosatu. One of the key agreements hammered out during the negotiations was a commitment to single large industrial unions in each industrial sector. A Volkswagen shopsteward Mbuyi Ngwenda remembers how the ANC in exile was drawn into these debates, "Instructions came from outside that Saawu should disbandon and fall into the structures of the registered, recognised unions. Saawu then agreed to take part in the formation of Cosatu."[170] The policy of one union, one industry, to which Fosatu had long subscribed, would have profound implications for the metal sector, as will shortly be discussed.

It was unity in action, not the unity negotiating table alone, that brought unions together to build trust and break down invisible barriers. The first evidence of this was in 1982 when Food and Canning Workers Union organiser, Neil Aggett's death in detention, sparked joint work stoppages and demonstrations in unions around the country. This was the strongest symbol yet of Fosatu and its affiliates commitment to worker unity and helped break down suspicions amongst the general, and more political unions. In Fosatu, and in unions such as Mawu and Naawu, the Aggett stoppages crystallised the recognition of the necessity for worker unity. This was reflected in the Fosatu Congress that followed shortly after where affiliates made as strong commitment to the formation of a new giant federation. A powerful two day stayaway in the Transvaal in November 1984, supported by at least 800 000 workers, was also to weld unity amongst unions of different political and trade union traditions. Fosatu's decision to support this UDF affiliated Congress of South African Students' (Cosas) call for united protest action did much to create trust between unions in unity discussions. (The nature and political implications of this stayaway are explored further in a later chapter). In 1985 again, the death of a Chemical Workers Industrial Union organiser and Fosatu's Transvaal Vice-Chair, Andries Raditsela, at police hands, triggered joint stoppages involving 100 000 workers and cemented unity immediately prior to Cosatu's formation. Fosatu and other unions also worked closely together to organise May Day rallies in 1984 when unions were taking part in serious unity talks. Shopstewards in locals countrywide discussed, and held, joint May Day rallies, resulting in large gatherings such as in Cape Town where more than 3 000 workers crammed into one hall to call for May 1, June 16 (day of the 1976 Soweto uprisings) and March 21, (day of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960) to be declared paid public holidays at a time when most public holidays celebrated Afrikaner events. In Natal thousands of workers wore May Day stickers and handed out pamphlets educating workers on this international holiday.[171] Some employers responded to these strident calls and many companies negotiated these holidays in private recognition agreements with the unions.

Cosatu, the largest trade union federation in South African history, was launched in December 1985 at the University of Natal where 760 delegates from 33 unions representing over 460 000 workers came together. It was launched in the middle of a State of Emergency, in a society gripped by fear and repression, yet this large federation of mainly black workers, had huge appeal for workers all over South Africa, both for its political stance and for its affiliates' reputation for winning real gains for workers. Workers flocked to join. The year following Cosatu's launch registered a massive 5.7 per cent growth in trade union density over the previous years' negative growth, the biggest rate of change in the 1980s.[172] According to Erwin, "In difficult times Cosatu gave workers a presence - the size, the enthusiasm, the style of Cosatu - gave workers a very visible presence."[173] Mawu's membership, for example, grew significantly from 38 789 in 1985 to 70 000 by 1987,[174] and the organisational strength of these unions gave Cosatu the power to withstand the emergency and, in fact, to grow through it, "Cosatu is first and foremost a trade union federation..." said its new General Secretary, Jay Naidoo, "Its roots are on the factory floor. Its starting point is its organisational strength at the point of production...Our political and economic strength lies in building powerful, militant, democratic organisation in the workplace. This strength will guarantee that workers' aspirations will not be suppressed. Such organisation is also the basis for the real democratisation of production."[175]

At Cosatu's launch affiliates resolved to work towards the unity of workers in the same industry, "...we will be unable to protect worker interests and advance their rights unless we build large broadly based industrial unions capable of dealing with the highly centralised structures of capital."[176] The slogan that was adopted was `One Union One Industry`. One important consequence of this commitment was that localised general unions were required to break up into their industrial components and to fuse these into expanded industrial unions. A second consequence was to give impetus to a similar development among the former Fosatu unions. It was a resolution that Cosatu's metal unions wholeheartedly supported especially as metal unity talks had been initiated in 1984 following unity initiatives to set up the new `super` federation. As Daniel Dube, a Numsa president commented,

> We were influenced by the unity talks that had led to the formation of Cosatu. To us, it was just a continuation, because decisions had been taken at the first Cosatu congress, that we need to encourage all unions that came together to form Cosatu, to start merging, according to the industries they came from, so as to create bigger, stronger, more effective industrial unions. Unity talks are something that was discussed over a number of years - quite a series of meetings were held with a variety of trade union groupings in the country. Even the black consciousness unions were at one stage coming into our unity discussions... Something that wasn't easy, but we were saying it's about time we do it.[177]

A merger of metal unions was first seriously put forward at the SA Council of the IMF Congress for its South African affiliates in 1984 where a project to facilitate the development of one union

per industry was mooted. It was a concept that was readily supported by workers on the ground. As a Mawu, and later Numsa, shopsteward Jerry Thibedi asserted, "Workers realised they were exploited by a united employer but were trying to fight that employer divided, so they therefore needed to work towards the formation of one strong union."[178] On 19 May 1984 Micwu, Naawu, and Mawu came together for the first time "to explore ways and means of developing greater co-operation in their organising work. The unions had overlapping interests in the motor industry and were often confronted with jurisdictional disputes with no forum in which to resolve them. The resultant in-fighting was recognised by all concerned to be destructive and wasteful."[179] Micwu however was not affiliated to the SAC IMF and it was only after its successful application to join in June 1984 that "a much needed forum within which the unions could build on the results of their first meeting."[180]was created. Thereafter the IMF encouraged unity in the metal industry by hosting a series of workshops which brought unionists from non-racial affiliates together for discussions. The unity negotiating committee consisted of Fred Sauls from Naawu, Geoff Schreiner and Bernie Fanaroff from Mawu, and Des East from Micwu. East commented, "The IMF played a very important role. Without their backing I don't think we would have reached where we are today."[181] In particular it provided crucial financial resources to sustain the unity initiative.

Mawu had pursued the idea of a merger for some time. At the Transvaal branch AGM in 1984 delegates called for all metal workers to unite into one powerful union to oppose the giant employers association, Seifsa (Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa), and again at the 1986 Congress delegates resolved to work towards a merger with other large democratically controlled unions in the metal industry, whilst general unions with small metal membership should be persuaded to hand over their membership. Naawu was treading the same path: "We are struggling for one metal union in South Africa, incorporating both the motor and metal industries. To have one metal union is the only way in which we can consolidate a position against monopoly capitalism in South Africa."[182] Mawu and Naawu already had a close and co-operative relationship from Fosatu days, and Naawu who was now organising some large auto companies in the Transvaal often assisted the overburdened Mawu in this region.

Micwu's presence in the IMF has been mentioned and was part of changes that the union underwent in the early 1980s. Up to 1979 Micwu had represented coloured workers alone but in 1980 it changed its constitution to include African workers. Changes in union policy took place after Tucsa's only coloured president, and Micwu's general secretary Ron Webb, resigned. Des East was appointed his successor and the union decided to democratise and expand by employing organisers and setting up regional offices and local branch executive committees. To begin with the union clashed repeatedly with both Naawu and Mawu. Naawu locked horns with Micwu in

the motor components sector in the Eastern Cape and Northern Transvaal and the Micwu Eastern Cape Divisional Secretary, approached Naawu a number of times to complain about the poaching of members in their factories. These members were chiefly coloured artisans and journeymen (mechanics) who were dissatisfied with Micwu's servicing and joined Naawu in factories such as Basaf, Armstrong Hydraulics and Dorbyl where Naawu engaged in plant bargaining, in contrast to Micwu who negotiated through the National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi). Conflict however in these areas did not escalate to the levels of violence that it did between Mawu and Micwu, especially on the East Rand in companies such as Lucas Industries Components, and Dorbyl, where at times clashes were bloody with both unions virulently accusing each other of poaching members. As East relates, "At that time the main pressure on us was coming from Mawu who was organising in the vehicle body building sector. We started to model ourselves on them. We employed an education officer and set up an education department. It became violent and ugly in the Transvaal. Workers beat each other up on trains especially in Dorbyl."[183]

New officials and a growing number of unskilled and semi-skilled African members, caused the union to change politically. Des East recalls,

> In 1983 I became first vice president of Tucsa. At the same congress, Micwu tabled a resolution opposing the tri-cameral parliament [184]. SABS supported us, it was the longest debate in Tucsa's history - 11 unions voted for our resolution, 61 abstained, and 2 voted against. It gave us a lot of publicity and we got support from our African members. Shortly after that Grobbelaar, GS of Tucsa, put his name to an advert supporting the tri-cameral parliament so we decided to pull out of Tucsa.
>
> We learnt that Naawu and Mawu's views of us had changed because of our stance. We felt attracted to the Numsa merger because we could not really speak for ourselves. In a Tucsa conference we felt that their concerns were not our concerns and we spoke out in these terms. We reached a stage when we had to ask where are we going with the emerging unions becoming prominent. We looked and realised we don't belong here.[185]

East was in line to be the next Tucsa president but Micwu made a decision to leave the federation in July 1984 when the union joined the IMF, and entered discussions with Mawu and Naawu. Here he recounts the process,

> The initial discussion we had was over how to reduce violence. In one meeting, Sauls said that he feels that we should say this `m` word, the only effective long term solution is to have one union. We started setting up conflict resolution mechanisms in each region - nothing was resolved. We took the discussion back to the union. There was strong resistance to the merger within our union especially those who had been in the union for a long time. The choice we had was this: did we stay as Micwu but die in the long term through a long and destructive process? Or did we more actively start talking seriously about a merger?[186]

Naawu and Mawu's `view` of Micwu continued to change as a result of further contact both on the IMF and in other bargaining forums. After Mawu entered the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi)in 1984, Micwu started to have

contact with the union because they now both represented semi- and unskilled African workers. By mid 1985, Micwu and Naawu were likewise exploring closer ties as Micwu passed on information from the Industrial Council (Nicmi) which represented workers in the motor components sector where Naawu was not represented, and Naawu backed Micwu in its demand for R2 an hour minimum wage at Council talks. They still did not co-operate in individual factories, however.

In addition, a merger with other metal unions was also being forced on Micwu from unanticipated quarters. As Ekki Esau relates, "And then we were exposed to a very unexpected pressure. Cosatu had just been formed and now in meetings our members were shouting `Viva Cosatu` and asking us if we belonged to Cosatu. We realised we had to decide where we were going."[187] Previously in the Transvaal, Micwu had been lucky if it attracted 60 workers to a general meeting. Now it was attracting 500-600 people. Micwu membership grew as it benefited from a general expansion of black unionism in the 1980s and because it took a determinedly non-racial position. In 1982 Micwu had 13,135 coloured members but by 1984 it had grown to 27 000[188] members and had moved substantially towards a non-racial composition of both African and coloured membership. Indeed, Micwu now organising highly replaceable unskilled and semi-skilled African workers, began to realise that power and improved working conditions came through numbers, and not through the scarcity of workers' skill.

In the months that followed the first 1984 IMF meeting regional dispute committees comprising representatives from each union were formed under the IMF. These committees dealt with jurisdictional disputes arising out of the overlapping of organising activities. At a motor caucus of the IMF in 1985 , according to merger minutes in 1986, Fred Sauls from Naawu declared "that the only permanent solution to the problem would be for the unions to amalgamate and that Naawu had in fact given him a mandate to initiate merger discussions."[189] Naawu and Mawu had recently become affiliates of Cosatu and Micwu was still abiding by a policy decision not to affiliate to any federation. Nevertheless in early 1986 merger talks began in earnest.

Unity talks were not easy. East remembers, "There were tremendous differences between ourselves and Mawu and Naawu - it seemed at the time that the gap between us was almost unbridgeable."[190] Abie Masabalala, a Micwu official, recalled when Sauls stood up at an IMF meeting and declared: "You know we never trusted you people because we didn't believe you were a true trade union, you people believed in begging."[191] Things were so sensitive that any minor issue was liable to derail talks. According to Ekki Esau, "When we all agreed to merge the name became a problem. Mawu came up with a name that was the same acronym as Mawu so we walked out!"[192] Unions were scared of losing their identity, of being swallowed up, of losing their

names, of losing their organisers, and they feared their secretaries and presidents would lose their jobs. Workers however often kept things on course, "We stated all we wanted was for workers to unite. We were not worried about names and positions." said Mawu shopsteward Joseph Sepetla.[193] One of the early differences that had to be resolved was whether the merger should lead to a union straddling the metal industry as a whole, or whether initially to create a motor union covering the manufacturing industry. Micwu favoured the latter, Naawu and Mawu the former. Yet ultimately these issues were resolved through regular meetings "with the parties represented mainly by one official each. This facilitated discussion and made it relatively easy for the non-political and administrative matters to be dealt with."[194] Such matters as the constitutional structures and meetings within the new union, affiliations, regional areas, membership, national office bearers, the composition of the secretariat, salaries and benefits, assets, principles and policies to guide the union and so on were thrashed out here.

One of the big fears for Micwu arose from a principle that had been agreed on in merger talks which affirmed that all resources would be commonly shared in the merged union. Micwu knew, as East recalls, that Mawu "had no financial resources. In fact it had a deficit...It was agreed to share all the existing expenses and pay outstanding debts and thereafter start a new union."[195] Micwu on the other hand had carefully accumulated both resources and assets. As East explains, "We had celebrated our 25th anniversary in 1984 and we had accumulated enough to buy our own building. The senior officials had cars so the merger would mean a serious change in the way we operated. We would have to throw money into the common pool. What would happen to money and our conditions? There was resistance from staff and the executive committee."[196] Yet Micwu appreciated what Mawu was trying to achieve, despite their reservations about the union's financial position, said Esau: "They were bankrupt but they were prepared to take a stand - our union didn't take a stand. We never had one strike. Our members could just walk out any time and get more money. The black worker was underpaid, overworked and treated like a piece of dirt..."[197], and they kept unity talks in perspective by focussing on the conditions in which many members worked. As East relates, "We tried to keep worker rights as the prime issue. In the end that argument won the day. If we can build on our strength, reduce conflict between workers that employers are using, then let's go for it."[198]

One of the smaller unions that came into Numsa bringing about 2 000 members was Macwusa. This was a considerable victory considering the history of antagonism between these unions. Discussions in the IMF brought home to all concerned that the motor components industry was highly fragmented, poorly organised by a range of different unions, and organisation was difficult to sustain because the industry was scattered countrywide, mainly in small factories. Such discussions led unionists in the local Eastern Cape IMF forum to the thorny issue of a merger

between Naawu and Macwusa where the legacy of the breakaway after the strike at Ford in 1979 still lingered. Their relationship had in fact worsened over the years. Although a small union of 2000 members, Macwusa had the ability seriously to undermine Naawu in some important local disputes. Macwusa rejected registration and conducted its union affairs in a highly politicised fashion which Naawu felt led them, at times, into anti-worker positions. Their relationship sharply deteriorated when Macwusa scabbed on 10 000 striking Naawu workers during Industrial Council negotiations, claiming the Council was "an apartheid vehicle geared to please management."[199] There were further clashes when both Macwusa and Naawu began to organise Sigma in Pretoria. Macwusa's leadership did not enter merger talks willingly. As Numsa unionists recall,

> [Macwusa's] leadership did not come into merger talks only the shopstewards, and they just used to come and listen and not take part. I think it was a strategy not to be seen as taking part in these talks. The comrades knew that Naawu was more dominant, and they knew they would be swallowed by Naawu. But it disadvantaged Naawu in factories where there was a perception that there was no democracy, that the leadership would take decisions and shopstewards were just conveyor belts for decisions by leadership... Pebco [Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation] would have a meeting and take positions, and then Naawu leadership and shopstewards would challenge where these decisions were taken. Then Naawu comrades would accuse township people of having the influence of Macwusa. [200]

Other breakaway wounds were also healed when Ummawusa agreed to join the merger talks and finally brought its 6 000 members into the new union. In line with the Cosatu resolution, other Cosatu affiliates agreed to hand over membership that technically fell within the scope of the metal unions. The General & Allied Workers Union (Gawu) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) handed over small numbers of metal members and in the tyre and rubber industry where Naawu, Mawu, and CWIU (all Cosatu affiliates) had organised 70 per cent of the industry, the uniting of metalworkers was logical.

There were however, some failed merger attempts. One of the biggest problems in unity talks was the issue of paid-up membership between unions who kept national records and strict financial accounts, and unions who had no national structures, and few financial procedures and could not prove membership. The principle of one organiser per thousand members coming into the merged union, meant that it was important to prove membership numbers and this led to some intractable problems with unions, like Saawu, which had no proof of membership. Daniel Dube recalls,

> I couldn't tell whether Saawu had members within the metal and engineering industries, or whether they had members in the textile industry, or whether they had members in another industry, or no members at all because... gatherings in the townships would fill a hall, and yet there are only seven paid-up members... In the unity discussions, we arrived at the conclusion that we need to submit a list of the names of our paid-up members, where they are working; what officials we have got - so that as per a certain number of paid-up members, we would also take an official from that union grouping. That is when we realised that after all they didn't have members, because they couldn't submit membership numbers. [201]

Ultimately Saawu defaulted on three deadlines to supply membership details, and were told they were welcome to come into Numsa at a later stage.

A more significant failure was the inability to bring in SABS, the white artisan union, with which both Mawu and Numsa from time to time forged significant union solidarity including non-racial joint strike action in 1984 at Highveld Steel, a rare event in those days. In the post Wiehahn era SABS was the one established union that was willing to work with independent metal unions and it was the only Tucsa union whose expulsion Fosatu had not demanded from the International Metalworkers Federation in 1982.[202] The union later left Tucsa in protest at its support for non-co-operation with unregistered unions and because of its support for the closed shop believing that workers should be able to join the union of their choice. SABS's general secretary, Ike van der Watt, was the IMF Council chair when Fosatu walked out in 1980. He endorsed unity between the emerging and established unions and worked hard to resurrect the Council. In retrospect Geoff Schreiner ascribes their absence from the merger in this way, "The Boilermakers under the leadership of Van der Watt were serious players and I don't think we were sufficiently sensitive to the concerns of the Boilermakers and their particular constituency, and so we never really won them over. I think there was a group in the union who could have made a greater commitment."[203]

Numsa was launched in May 1987 at a three day congress in Crown Mines, Johannesburg, in an atmosphere of siege captured by Naawu's Vice President. John Gomomo[204] in his opening speech to the Congress where he declared that metal workers were under attack as never before, that tens of thousands had been retrenched in the previous five years, that key union leaders had been detained, and that organisers had been killed in attacks on Cosatu in Natal. He reminded delegates of the recent bombing of *Cosatu House* and of the police siege that took place earlier that year when documents and correspondence dealing with day to day union activities were ransacked and destroyed. He concluded by saying that, "The only guarantee for the safety of our movement ... is strong structures and workers' control of our organisation."[205]

It was truly a giant union by South African standards incorporating 130 796 paid up members. It constituted the second largest Cosatu affiliate (the National Union of Mineworkers had 261 901 paid up members[206]), and was the second Cosatu affiliate merger. The backbone of Numsa was Mawu's 70 000[207] membership which had undergone phenomenal growth from 6 700 members in 1979 (Mawu grew by 700 members in the period 1973 - 1979) to 70 000 members in 1987.[208] Micwu brought the second largest number of workers to the merger - an impressive 40 000[209] members. The third largest union to merge into Numsa was Naawu, which despite the retrenchment of nearly 5 000 workers at Ford in 1985 had registered significant growth. In the

early 1980s Naawu grew rapidly with the motor assembly industry becoming the most highly unionised in the country. By 1985 Naawu was negotiating in all auto plants in South Africa except Nissan. The union grew by a steady one thousand members a year from 1982 when it had 17 000 members, dropped in 1985 to 18 673 in 1985 (despite the loss of 5000 members from Ford this figure still depicts a growth in new membership) and then increased over the next two years to 23 977 at the point of merger into Numsa.[210]

Macun has pointed out that it is "union density" that is significant in a unions' power position within an industry. He defines union density as "...the membership of unions as a proportion of potential members in an industry. The higher the union density, the greater the power and influence the unions can exercise."[211] The unity and growth within the metal unions meant that at the time of merger the union had organised 130 000 of the potential 500 000 workers in the motor and metal industries, representing 26 per cent of the potential membership in the industry.[212]

A great deal of wisdom, experience and styles of organising came into Numsa from the diverse union traditions. Over the following years the union worked hard at forging a common identity even if at times somewhat unevenly. Numsa, through its merged components, held significant membership in four regions: Natal, Eastern Cape, Transvaal, and Western Cape and was open to workers who assembled, made, repaired, serviced and sold cars and car parts, including tyres; workers who made steel and other similar products like aluminium, and who made goods from steel; and workers who serviced garage pumps and workshops and who produced component parts for the auto industry. In one powerful act Numsa brought together a wide range of South African workers (except for whites) significantly strengthening non-racial organisation in the metal industry. Besides its affiliation to Cosatu, in a spirit of international worker unity it affiliated to the IMF, and the International Chemical and Energy Federation (ICEF). The new union, in what was now becoming a tradition deriving from the Tuacc days, was guided by the principles of non-racialism, internal democracy and workers' control, and critically, worker unity, "We, the members of the National Union of South Africa, firmly commit ourselves to a united South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation. We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of an organised and united working class..." ran the first sentences of the preamble to the union's constitution.[213]

The election of Naawu's Daniel Dube as president of the new union was a powerful moment remembers East, "The merger was a lot of hard work, a lot of vindictive stuff went on, we had to overcome personality problems. But the election of Dube made us realise that we had brought something that was going to change the course of the union's history."[214] Dube himself was stunned and honoured by his election believing he was "more of a compromise position." In reality

he was a product of the powerful worker leadership that the emerging unions had produced through their policies of worker control on the factory floor and within union structures, and in the coming year he was important in uniting the distinct elements within the union because all the different groupings liked, and respected him. According to Micwu's Percy Thomas who was elected Second Vice President, "It is extremely difficult to single out anybody. If I must then, I would say that the person who commanded my greatest respect was Daniel Dube. What a great, charismatic, worker leader and what an honour too have served alongside him."[215]

Dube boomed out across the Congress floor, "This union was not only created for those who took part in the congress. We campaign for all workers, to increase our bargaining power and our political power - the power of all the oppressed.",[216] a sentiment that was echoed by Cosatu's Jay Naidoo: "We must build organisation - it is our defence. We must consolidate and advance in all sectors. The tides have turned; workers are on the march. The greatest defence of Cosatu is to understand this."[217] But the last word went to Numsa workers who in a spirit of high optimism, despite the gloomy political climate, were experiencing a surge of worker power that only unity and growth of this magnitude could bring: "Workers see this is going to be a massive union. If you call a general strike, the whole country will come to a standstill - we can put the bosses in a tight corner or crush them."[218]

5. Conclusion

Economic recession, obdurate employers, high rates of unemployment, escalating repression and violence, none of these stopped the numerical growth of the metal unions throughout the 1980s. Many saw the mid eighties, when a State of Emergency was declared, as a significant "cut-off point" for the coming of age of the metal unions and the new union movement. Naawu official Taffy Adler observed, "I think at that stage there was a self-conscious union movement. There was a large number of organised workers and a coherent leadership. And by the time of the formation of Cosatu, where a whole lot of new dynamics started to arise particularly in relation to the political process, there was a substantial union movement which had been built from nothing."[219]

This `large number of organised workers` with a `coherent leadership` would have implications on a number of levels in the attainment of trade union power as this thesis will continue to explore. Here we are dealing with Macun's definition of trade union power in the arena of `organisational power` where the level of unionisation, the degree of unity and cohesion, and representational and administrative capacity become critical for the acquisition of power. A deteriorating economic and political climate had produced a militant workforce who possessed a highly developed sense of common purpose. This combined with the innovative and strategic thinking of a mature leadership had allowed these metal unions to build up, and maintain, significant levels of organisational

coherence which they would wield in furthering their members' rights. The unions had worked towards a cohesion and unity in the metal sector where escalating levels of union density allowed for a significant degree of power and influence in a highly strategic sector of the economy.

Lester has pointed to the fallacy of the assumption that the larger the union the greater its effectiveness, efficiency and power, referring to "the naive notion that size and power are directly correlated."[220] This he believes is an assumption which stems from the notion that a bigger union can hire more specialised staff and pool resources more effectively. He points to the fact that growth often involves a disempowerment of the union at local factory level and a subsequent decrease in the militancy. Growth however at this point in the unions' history, in the early and mid 1980s, was essential for their stated aim of building national industrial power to effect changes to the working conditions of metal workers everywhere in South Africa. Numerical growth, and the power it represented, promoted further growth, and as numbers increased, the influence of these unions spread and they grew exponentially. Moreover, the development of internal organisational coherence allowed these unions to better service membership, to accommodate significant levels of workers' control despite increased size, and to accumulate greater financial resources which permitted them to further develop their administrative and organisational capacity. The formation of Numsa was a symbol of this increased numerical power, internal cohesion, and worker solidarity. As Dube expressed it at the launch, "... the metal sector, the power that is at our disposal, the power that we have in our hands is not a small power, comrades."[221]

Important factors in explaining this build up of power were rapid numerical growth assisted by legal reform, and the ability for union leadership to successfully accommodate itself to harsh economic and macro-political developments. Despite overwhelming pressures, these unions dedicated themselves to seeking worker unity wherever possible, and were able to incorporate formerly racially exclusive and dissident unions. Their vision concentrated the numerical gains of all these unions into a single coherent national industrial metal union. This was a deliberate strategy. What these unionists were less conscious of however, was how the racial stratification of the labour force in South Africa eliminated a substantial amount of inter-union competition in the recruitment of members. As Ross has indicated, the South African trade union movement follows on the Anglo-Celtic tradition which reveals itself in the extent to which occupational categories provide the basis for trade union organisation.[222] In South Africa occupational categories were racially defined and the established union movement was not concerned to organise African categories and only marginally interested in organising coloured workers. This factor substantially reduced trade union competition for unions organising black workers which, as Ross notes, had been a significant feature of union movements elsewhere in the world where inter-union violence in similar industrial sectors was common. There *was* competition with Tucsa (or ex-Tucsa) unions

who, in response to the emerging union movement, had embarked on organising African workers as was witnessed in the Mawu/Micwu conflict. In the main, however, the field was wide open for these unions to organise black workers. This contributed to their rapid growth.

The accretion of power however, cannot emanate from increased numbers and concentrated organisational coherence, alone. For organisations to retain credibility with membership and to increase numbers exponentially there has to be a degree of success, an element of delivery. Membership flocked to these unions in large numbers because they witnessed the increased wages, the improved conditions, the acquisition of a measure of control over their working lives, and the dignity and humanity that these gains accorded them. It was through some remarkable disputes and industrial action that these altered working conditions were accrued, and with each achievement more members came in, and with each surge in membership came the increased ability to challenge management, to challenge the industry, and to win more. The following chapter explores some of these pivotal disputes and demonstrates how Naawu and Mawu's reputations as `struggle unions` had a dramatic effect on worker confidence. This led to the spread of their power and influence across the country, including into semi-rural areas.

ENDNOTES

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[54] Interview Allan Murray former Scaw Metals Group Human Resources Director, Johannesburg, March 2003.
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[63] Tarrow, S (1998:19): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
[64] Interview Nehemia Makama, Johannesburg, 1996. 'Baba Kay' as he was known was a worker at Heinemann in 1976 when workers' struck and he was dismissed. He was then employed by Mawu as an organiser and transferred to Numsa as an organiser in 1987. He retired in 1996 and returned to his home in Swaziland.
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[66] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, 1996.
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[74] Interview Taffy Adler, May 1997. Adler began union work as a volunteer in the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) where he became a full-time employee in 1976, followed by employment in its successors the Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand (CIWW), Tuacc Transvaal, and as Fosatu Transvaal Regional Secretary in 1979. He became an organiser for Naawu Transvaal region in 1981, leaving the union in 1986.
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[95] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg 1996.
[96] Ibid.
[97] In 1974 Mawu had 3 900 members, by 1980 it had 10 000; by 1981 this had risen to 24 300; and by November 1982 its membership had risen to 36 500 making it the largest independent union in the country with 14 different centres, 4 branches and 20 full time officials. Ari Sitas reported in the *SALB* in March 1983 that Mawu Natal had 2 900 paid up members but by September of the same year the branch had increased to 7 000 paid up members. By 1984 Mawu's general secretary Thembi Naabe in a progress report gave Mawu's membership as 36 000 making it the biggest union in Fosatu and the largest union in the metal industry. The biggest branch was the Transvaal with about 24 000 members with 17 organisers and 2 administrators in the branch. Naabe also reported that the Southern Natal branch now had 9 000 members with nine organisers and one administrator. Northern Natal, a new branch (established in 1981) had about 2 000 members serviced by three staff members and a very small branch in the Eastern Cape (established in 1982) had less than 100 members. This information comes from various sources and it is not always clear with these early membership figures whether signed up or paid up membership is indicated. *(Umbiko we Mawu* (1985):5, `Mawu National AGM`, Vol 3 No 3 July 1985; Charney, C: 4 Trade Union Moves in *Work in Progress* 27, 1983; Sitas, A (1983): 1, ` Briefings: MAWU rapid growth in Natal` in *SALB* Vol 8.8 and 9.9 Sept/Oct 1983; Webster, Eddie (1985:232/233) *Cast in a Racial Mould*.
[98] Lewis, David (1983:26): "Trade union organisation and Economic Recession.
[99] Macun, Ian (1993:67): "South African Unions: Still growing" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No 4 July/Aug 1993.
[100] This undated booklet entitled *Mawu Our History Our Principles Our Policies* from the content covered was probably produced by Mawu in 1985 or 1986, personal copy.
[101] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:55): *Comrade Moss* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
[102] Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, May 1997 who was a shopsteward at Litemaster and chair person of the Transvaal Branch, and of the Katlehong Local covering Germiston, Wadeville and Alberton in the early 1980s, was dismissed from Litemaster in 1983 and later became a Mawu and Numsa organiser in the East Rand Branch of the union.- this was his position at the point this interview was conducted in 1997.
[103] Webster, Eddie (1985:248): *Cast in a Racial Mould.*
[104] Interview Mtutuzeli Tom, Johannesburg, 1997. He initially joined Saawu at Mercedes Benz South Africa (MBSA) but crossed the floor to join Naawu in 1984. He became a shopsteward a position he continued to hold in Numsa where he rose through the union ranks to become Numsa's president - a position he held at the point of this interview in June 1997.
[105] Interview Les Kettledas , Johannesburg, June 1997. Kettledas was originally a technician at

General Motors (GM) when he joined Numarwosa in 1968, where he was elected onto the PE branch executive but was expelled in 1972 for leading a rebel group who were organising African workers in the parallel UAW from 1971. He was later reinstated when he was elected to the BEC as branch secretary in 1974, a full-time position. He held the position of Fosatu Regional Secretary in the Eastern Cape from 1979 - 1985 and was Cosatu acting Eastern Cape Regional Secretary from 1985 - 1987. He joined Naawu in 1980 and on the merger with Numsa became the National Organiser for the Automobile, Motor & Tyre. He left the union in 1994 to join the Department of Labour where in 1995 he was appointed the Deputy Director General - a position he held at the time of this interview.

[106] Interview Moses (Moss) Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996. He was a worker for Toyota in Kew Johannesburg when he joined Mawu in 1975, was dismissed and became a roving organiser for Mawu on the East Rand. He was elected branch secretary of the Transvaal Branch, and later became Numsa's first general secretary in 1987, holding this position despite his detention and trial on treason charges when he was finally acquitted in 1989. He left the union to become an ANC parliamentarian after the 1994 democratic elections.

[107] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, June 1997. Ngwenda was expelled from Fort Hare during student protests and was thereafter employed at Volkswagen where he joined Naawu in 1984 where he became a shopsteward. He was detained for three years from 1986 under the State of Emergency, returned to VW and was elected a National Numsa office bearer, later becoming General Secretary of Numsa in 1997. He retired from the position because of illness and died in 1999.

[108] Friedman, Steven (1987:253): *Building Tomorrow Today.*

[109] Story related by a shopsteward from Numsa's Johannesburg Central Local Council focus group in 1997.

[110] Webster, E (1988) "The Rise of Social-Movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa" in *State Resistance and Change in South Africa.*

[111] Davidson, Alistair (1977:124): *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, Merlin Press Ltd, Great Britain; Boggs, Carl (1976) *Gramsci's Marxism* Pluto Press, London.

[112] *Fosatu Workers News*, "Major new role for shop stewards' councils" May 1982, personal copy.

[113] An organiser quoted in Baskin, Jeremy (1982:47): `Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council' in *The Independent Trade Unions 1974 - 1984:Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, ed Johann Maree Ravan Press, 1987 Braamfontein Johannesburg.

[114] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom/Sached Trust (1989:71): *Comrade Moss* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.

[115] Ibid

[116] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, 1996.

[117] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.

[118] Friedman, Steven (1987:252): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.

[119] Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa (1996), a Mawu union member at Huletts, who on dismissal became a Mawu official in Natal and later a Numsa organiser.

[120] Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, May 1997

[121] Interview Elias Monage, Johannesburg, August 1997. Monage became interested in trade unions when he was a member of the Katlehong Youth League and set about organising workers into Mawu when he joined Don Products in 1984 where he became a shopsteward. In 1991 he became a Numsa organiser on the East Rand and was later appointed a National Negotiator for the Engineering Sector, a position he held when this interview was conducted.

[122] Baskin, Jeremy (1982:48): `Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council' in *The Independent Trade Unions 1974 - 1984:Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, ed Johann Maree Ravan Press, 1987 Braamfontein Johannesburg.

[123] *Fosatu Worker News* "Mawu launches new campaign" July 1982, personal copy.

[124] Obery, I. 1984: `Recession and Retrenchment in the East Rand Metal Industry, 1982' in *South African Labour Bulletin*; Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions.*

[125] Quoted in Baskin, Jeremy (1982:48): `Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council' in *The Independent Trade Unions 1974 - 1984:Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, ed Johann Maree Ravan Press, 1987 Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[126] The stated aims of the Springs Local was to build solidarity, counteract sectional interests of workers, organise workers into Fosatu, assist workers and unions with solidarity action through publicity, financial support, and making links with community organisations, and encourage solidarity between community and workers' struggles. (Baskin, 1982: "Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council"). And Peter Dantjies, a Mawu organiser remembers the Pretoria local like this: "As soon as I was employed we set up a Pretoria local council where the entire elected shopstewards in organised factories served on the local. They were effective as they were forums to share information on what is happening in the factory and to strategise on how to deal with issues and engage management. We workshopped here and built capacity because it was not easy for one organiser to be in every factory. So we would meet weekly and plan. And we used those councils to organise. We identified factories and assigned a team and told them which factories they must organise - it was a collective thing not only the role of the organiser." (Interview, June 1997)
[127] Interview Kettledas, Johannesburg, June 1997
[128] Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, 1997.
[129] Webster, Eddie (1985:238): *Cast in a Racial Mould.*
[130] Quoted in Baskin, Jeremy (1982:53): `Growth of a New Worker Organ`.
[131] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom)/Sached Trust (1989:72): *Comrade Moss* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
[132] Cammett, J (1967) *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* Stanford University Press, Stanford , California.
[133] Tarrow, S (1998:21) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
[134] Bonin, Deborah R (1982:168): "Class consciousness and conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 - 1987: The Case of BTR Sarmcol Workers" MA dissertation, University of Natal.
[135] Ibid.
[136] It was known as "Gwala's Union" after the organiser and recruiter, Harry Gwala, who was later imprisoned and banned as a result of ANC underground activities.
[137] Ruiters, Greg (1995:97): *South African Liberation Politics: A Case Study of Collective Action and Leadership in Katorus, 1980-1989* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
[138] Comments by Suttner based on his paper "Your Mother is Your First Enemy" presented at Wits Interdisciplinary Seminar Research Seminar hosted by Wits Law School, Wits Institute for Social Studies, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 2003.
[139] Kubheka, Sipho (1994): "The struggle to be reborn: 20 years of the labour movement" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 18 No 5 November 1994.
[140] Interview Peet Pheku, Johannesburg, September 1996. Pheku was a worker at Heckitt when he joined the Industrial Aid Society in 1972. He began secretly organising Heckitt workers, and later Dunswart Steel workers. He was fired in 1997 and became first a voluntary and then permanent organiser for Mawu. He organised from the first Mawu local offices in Boksburg. He later transferred to Numsa as an organiser and left the union in 1996.
[141] Enoch Godongwana, Moses Mayekiso, Alec Erwin, Taffy Adler, Dumisane Mbanjwa to name a few.
[142] Ginsburg, Matthew (1997;109): *Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour Movement* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
[143] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Fosatu Papers AH 1999 "Minutes of the Second F.O.S.A.T.U. Central Committee meeting held on the 29th and 30th September, 1979 at Koinonia, Durban".
[144] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Fosatu Papers AH 1999. "Fosatu National Seminar Schedule - January-September 1981".
[145] Focus Group Numsa Vaal Region, September 1997.

[146] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
[147] Interview Adrienne Bird with Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[148] Interview Elias Monage, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[149] Ginsburg, Matthew (1997): *Trade Union Education.*
[150] Kubheka, Sipho (1994): "The struggle to be reborn".
[151] Interview Adrienne Bird with Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[152] Kubheka, Sipho (1994): "The struggle to be reborn".
[153] Interview Adrienne Bird with Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[154] Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
[155] Mawu, (undated):23 *Mawu Our History Our Principles Our Policies* (Mawu), personal copy.
[156] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, 1996.
[157] Friedman, Steven (1987:419): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
[158] Ibid, 402.
[159] Wages Commission (1982:40): *An Introduction to Labour Organisation in South Africa,* Wages Commission (UCT), Cape Town.
[160] Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[161] Interview Gavin Hartford, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[162] All quotes in this paragraph from an interview with Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[163] Swilling, Mark, (1984:116): "Workers Divided: A Critical Assessment of the Split in Mawu on the East Rand" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 1 Aug/Sept 1984.
[164] "The workers realised later, and they dismissed him again in Ummawusa because of corruption and the workers came back to Mawu." (Interview with Mayekiso,1996).
[165] Interview Elias Monage, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[166] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996. Erwin was general secretary of both Tuacc and Fosatu at their inception, and on the dissolution of Fosatu joined Numsa in 1987 to become Education Secretary. He held this position until the 1994 democratic elections when as an ANC parliamentarian he was appointed Minister of Finance, a position he held at the time of this interview, later becoming Minister of Trade and Industry.
[167] Interview Kosi Matlala, Pretoria November 1996. Matlala originally worked for NUTW (National Union of Textile Workers) in Germiston but was recruited by Mawu in 1984 after the union split to head up the administration and finances in their new head office in Harrister House in Johannesburg. In Numsa she became an administrator in the organising department and at the time of this interview was working as a senior administrator in Pretoria in the offices of Numsa's Northern Transvaal Region.
[168] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[169] During unity talks Cusa was often in sympathy with the black consciousness Azactu (Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions) with both of them opposing the non-racialism of the other unions and firmly propounding their commitment to black leadership. Azactu first withdrew from unity talks followed by Cusa in August 1995. Thereafter in October 1986, Cusa and Azactu merged to form Nactu (National Council of Trade Unions) which had about 400 000 members in 24 trade unions.
[170] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[171] *Fosatu Worker News* "May Day Unity" No 29 1984, personal copy.
[172] Macun, Ian (2000): *Growth, Structure and Power in the South African Union Movement.*
[173] *Numsa: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department (undated).
[174] The former figure comes from Cosatu's publication *The Shopsteward* December 1995, and the latter figure from Baskin's (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu.*
[175] Quote from *Numsa: Insimbi Ayigobi*.
[176] Cosatu Congress Resolution "National Industrial Unions" 1985, personal copy.
[177] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997. Dube joined UAW in 1977 at SKF in Port Elizabeth and was a senior shopsteward in SKF when the union merged to become Naawu, later becoming its president. He was elected to Cosatu's first Executive, and was later elected Numsa president at its founding congress in 1987. At the time of this interview he was the SKF

representative on the MIGPF (Metal Industry Group Pension Fund).
[178] Quote from Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi*.
[179] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, Metal & Allied Workers Union Collection Box AH 1077/H.9. "Minutes of merger meeting between Mawu-Naawu-Micwu, held on the 1st and 2nd November 1986 at the President Holiday Inn".
[180] Ibid.
[181] Both quotations in this paragraph are from an interview with Kettledas, 1997. 1986.
[182] Green, P (1986:66) "PE Auto Industry - The End of an Era".
[183] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997
[184] The Nationalist government put forward a plan to change the constitution of South Africa by introducing three separate parliaments for Coloureds, Asians, and Whites with the white parliament having the power of veto over decisions made in the other two parliaments - Africans were excluded entirely.
[185] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, 1996.
[188] The former figure comes from Wages Commission (1982): *An Introduction to Labour Organisation in SA* and the latter figure from *IMF Mission*, (1984).
[189] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, Metal & Allied Workers Union Collection Box AH 1077/H.9. "Minutes of merger meeting between Mawu-Naawu-Micwu, held on the 1st and 2nd November 1986 at the President Holiday Inn".
[190] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997.
[191] Quoted in Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department (undated but probably 1993).
[192] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, 1996.
[193] Quoted on Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department (undated but probably 1993).
[194] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, Metal & Allied Workers Union Collection Box AH 1077/H.9 "Minutes of merger meeting between Mawu-Naawu-Micwu, held on the 1st and 2nd November 1986 at the President Holiday Inn".
[195] Interview Khayo Madlala, Durban, December 1996. Madlala was a Mawu shopsteward at Gedore Tools in Durban's Pinetown industrial area. He joined Mawu in the early 1970s.
[196] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997.
[197] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, 1996.
[198] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997.
[199] Friedman, Steven (1987:312): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
[200] Focus Group Numsa Eastern Cape Region, September 1997.
[201] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
[202] Friedman, Steven (1987:312): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
[203] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[204] John Gomomo was a senior shopsteward at VW in Uitenhage, a Naawu Vice President, chairperson of Fosatu's Eastern Cape Region, and a Numsa national executive member. He was elected Cosatu's Second Vice President in 1989, and was later elected Cosatu President.
[205] *Cosatu Education*, 1987:19 (Cosatu).
[206] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:213): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu.*
[207] There is a tendency amongst commentators to equate Mawu with Numsa and to thus compare Mawu's membership with the growth of membership in Numsa. Ruiters, for example, takes Mawu's membership as a point of departure to demonstrate the huge growth of membership in Numsa. He forgets that Numsa consisted of an amalgam of unions all of which had substantial membership prior to Numsa's formation.
[208] The 1979 figure is from Webster's *Cast in a Racial Mould* (1985:233) and the 1987 merger figure is from Baskin's *Striking Back* (1991:199).
[209] This figure comes from Des East although Baskin in *Striking Back* puts Micwu's membership at merger into Numsa in 1987 at 35 000 members.

[210] These figures are taken from both MacShane, Plaut and Ward (1984): *Power! Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa* (Spokesman, Nottingham England) and from files in the Registry Office of the Department of Labour which records membership in registered trade unions. At this point the Department recorded membership figures in racially defined categories - white membership was never more than nine members, and African membership exceeded coloured membership for the first time in 1984.
[211] Macun, Ian (2000): *Growth, Structure and Power in the South African Union Movement* in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997,* eds G Adler and E Webster (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg)
[212] *South African Labour Bulletin* correspondent (1987) "Numsa launch" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 12 No 5 July 1987.
[213] The full text of the preamble to Numsa's constitution ran as follows:

Constitution of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

1. Preamble
We, the members of the National Union of South Africa, firmly commit ourselves to a united South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation.

We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of an organised and united working class. Our experience has taught us that to achieve this goal we must:

(a) fight and oppose discrimination in all its forms within the union, the factories and in society;
(b) strive for maximum unity amongst organised metalworkers and organise every unorganised metalworker into our national industrial union;
(c) ensure that all levels of our union are democratically structured and controlled by the worker members themselves through elected worker committees;
(d) encourage democratic worker leadership and organisation in our factories and in all spheres of society;
(e) reinforce and encourage progressive international worker-to-worker contact so as to strengthen the world-wide society of metalworkers.

We call on all metalworkers who identify with these principles and aims to join us and the metalworkers we represent, as comrades in the struggle ahead. We call on all metalworkers to set aside any prejudices they may have and strive for unity under the guiding slogan of the international working class:

"From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs".

There was a battle to register the constitution of Numsa because of this preamble which concluded with the communist slogan "From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs". The union had to submit the constitution without the preamble and only then would the Minister of Manpower agree to register it. For union purposes the preamble was never dropped.
[214] Interview Des East, Johannesburg, 1997.
[215] Percy Thomas was a Micwu worker and was elected Second Vice President at Numsa's launching Congress in 1987.
[216] Quoted in Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi*.
[217] *Cosatu News* "Numsa the new giant" No 5 1987, Dirk Hartford collection.
[218] Mtutuzeli Tom quoted on Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department (undated).
[219] Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[220] Lester, Richard (1958:23): *As Unions Mature: An Analysis of the Evolution of American Unionism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
[221] Quoted in Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and

Research Department (undated but probably 1993).
[222] Martin, Ross (1989:141) *Trade Unionism: Purposes and Forms* Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Chapter 3
Breaking the apartheid mould

1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how organisational strategies and legal reform were critical to the growth of metal unions in the 1980s. Both these unions however understood that power did not emanate from numbers alone. A large and committed membership was only an asset if the union continuously evolved strategies and tactics to mobilise this power in effective ways. This chapter focuses on the building of power through militant industrial action; a power which derived from both successful and unsuccessful outcomes of workers' original demands. The power to force the unions into recalcitrant factories and to engage in negotiating wages and working conditions was progressively built in factories, across industrial areas, and increasingly across regions.

In the final analysis it is the strike weapon, the ability to withdraw labour, that lies at the basis of trade union power. This is of course the wielding of collective power. Individual workers are easy to replace but replacing an entire workforce is a far more difficult proposition. Lane has defined strikes as, "...quite simply, a challenge to the autonomy of managerial control. They are the means by which labour refuses to behave merely as a commodity...to go on strike is to deny the existing distribution of power and authority. The striker ceases to respond to managerial command; he refuses to do his work."[1] Most actions stem from the rank and file and most strikes originate in the spontaneous action of workers followed by official union authorisation. In these instances management has much less opportunity to plan its responses than in the case of a formal notice of an official dispute and thus spontaneous strikes are often the most effective means for workers to insist on a say in matters affecting their working lives. Fantasia asserts that "trade unionism is based on worker solidarity and effective mobilisation of collective action" and that "militance and solidarity" are "the ultimate base of working class power."[2] Furthermore he asserts that solidarity is welded in the very act of opposition. That is, that solidarity is to a large degree formed and intensified during the strike action itself. Like Hyman, he believes that it is the spontaneous strike which has a degree of independence from official bargaining routines that most often effectively expresses and redresses workers' grievances.

The early eighties in South Africa signalled a notable departure from infrequent industrial action a decade before as a plethora of industrial disputes broke out. Most of these disputes were spontaneous in nature and many forged significant degrees of worker solidarity. Many workers who participated in such actions were not unionised and it was Naawu, and to an even greater

degree Mawu, who appreciated the power of such spontaneity and how it could be harnessed to the aim of building national worker power. In this appreciation of the power of spontaneous action it was the heir to German socialist leader Rosa's Luxemburg's theory of spontaneity. She wrote of the Russian revolutionary movement, " Its most important and fruitful tactical turns of the last decade were not by any means `invented` by determinate leaders of the movement, and much less by leading organisations, but were in each case the spontaneous product of an unfettered movement itself." She asserted, echoing Vladimir Lenin, that `activity itself educates the masses.`[3] This too was to become the understanding and experience of these unions following their cautious, controlled organisational attempts of the 1970s. The number of spontaneous strikes on the East Rand between 1981- 1982, for example, constituted the largest number of strikes in South African labour history over a concentrated period of time.[4] Indeed strikes were so numerous that it is not possible to examine them all in meaningful detail in a study of this length. This chapter has therefore chosen to look at pivotal disputes which advanced the unions' agendas or strategies in significant ways and which illustrate how power was built in a multifaceted manner. Significantly, it will be seen, these disputes not only struck at the heart of capitalist exploitation but they all, in some manner, broke the apartheid mould at a time when grand apartheid was at its height. The industrial actions I have chosen to look at in more detail deal with firstly pioneering individual company stoppages - the 1980 Volkswagen strike, the 1981 Sigma strike and the 1984 BMW strike all in the auto sector; and the 1982 strikes at Alusaf and at B&S in the metal engineering sector. And secondly, major strike waves, namely the 1981 pension strikes and the East Rand strike wave of 1981 - 1982. All of these disputes assailed in various ways the divisions that the apartheid state sought to entrench in order to secure racial capitalism and white domination.

Underlying much of this industrial action was a new confidence that the painstaking organisational work of the seventies and the new labour laws had imparted to workers. This confidence expressed itself as a determination by workers to negotiate their own wages and working conditions and not have conditions imposed upon them by employer organisations such as Seifsa on the metal industrial council where they were not represented, or by individual employers, or by ivory tower academics bench-marking workers' wages against a hypothetical Poverty Datum Line (PDL) or Supplementary Living Level (SLL). Behind their demands lay the principle of transparent consultation, negotiation and workers' control. Both employers and the government treated black workers like children who needed adult guidance and who were punished for disobedience, but the coming of the new unions, with their emphasis on workers' control and on workers taking responsibility for their own struggle, brought a blossoming of new ideas, demands, tactics, and innovative struggles on a scale which had never before been witnessed in the South African labour movement.

This burst of innovative energy was released by the dynamic relationship between union intellectuals, union leadership and membership. Militant action over grievances sometimes took union strategists by surprise and were sometimes even perceived as misdirected. They nevertheless prompted strategic think-tanks on how to channel this dissatisfaction into a set of carefully considered conditions and demands which would over time bring long-term gains for members. These long-term demands were often not what was in the forefront of workers' minds but represented a refocusing and deepening that struck more directly, in some instances at least, at the heart of their exploitation. In this way the unions began to become involved in deeper restructuring issues with capital which had been their intention from their inception. Many issues raised in this outbreak of unprecedented industrial action were not taken up, won, or immediately resolved but were harboured in the organisations' collective memory to be returned to later, or incrementally built on as the opportunity arose. The unions were often taken off guard by the scale of industrial action and lacked sufficient resources to cope and yet creative approaches moved their agenda forward and opened up new strategic opportunities which allowed workers' to push back the frontiers of control in their factories.

Tarrow has remarked on how social movements which are seldom `bound by institutional routines' give rise to a leadership which is highly creative `in selecting forms of collective action. Leaders invent, adapt, and combine various forms of contention..."[5] Thus it was in Mawu and Naawu. National leadership, shopstewards and union membership deployed a host of innovative tactics in their factory struggles which included go-slows, work-to-rule, grasshopper strikes, trial of strength disputes, demonstration stoppages, consumer boycotts, legal action, siyalalas (sleep-ins), strategic negotiations', community solidarity, house visits, fund-raising strategies and international solidarity to name a few. Any number of tactics would be applied in a single dispute with the aim of keeping one step ahead of employers. A number of these disputes threw up significant new ways of sustaining solidarity giving striking workers the power to resist management encroachments on their unity. Initially union members relied heavily on the element of surprise as complacent employers proved out of touch with their workforces. Labour relations procedures and laws thus allowed workers to gain victories through employer blunders and lack of sophistication. As employers became more familiar with labour relation matters, however, workers were forced to reassess and redefine their tactics and to devise new strategies that would again take management unawares. It was a dynamic and dialectical process whereby unions would utilise a dispute tactic or loophole in labour law, make gains, then employers in their turn would become familiar with the strategy and successfully retaliate forcing the union to re-evaluate its tactics and to view the defeat of its previous approach as an opportunity to evolve a more effective way forward.

It can be argued that this flexing of worker power was enhanced by the unions' independence from

political formations. Independence from formal political or other organisations meant they had the flexibility to respond rapidly, and to alter strategic and policy directions without being fettered with external dogmas, delays and indecision, or the weight of bureaucracy. Strikes often took the unions by surprise but this independence allowed them to move with the flow of the moment and to turn it to advantage. The unions had the opportunity to debate and freely to choose from a range of strategies on how and when to intervene as well as what constituted the most appropriate intervention. They also had the freedom to reverse previous positions in consultation with their membership who were in the final analysis the only body to whom they were accountable. It was this freedom to manoeuvre that allowed for such an explosion of creativity and innovation.
It was through militant industrial action that the unions were able to force their way into factories and every act of defiance, every success, had the domino effect of providing an example and giving the psychological emancipation to other workers to stand up to the white employer. This greatly increased the size and power of the metal unions as they expanded to all corners of the country moving from the dense industrial areas of South Africa's major cities, to more remote towns and homelands in isolated rural areas.

2. Spontaneous actions: 1981 -1982

Volkswagen strike 1980

The 1980 strike waged at the German subsidiary Volkswagen, in Uitenhage, had a particularly large impact on bargaining demands and the style of industrial action in the eighties. The factory had been well-organised by UAW/Numarwosa in the late 1970s. Recognition had been achieved in 1977 and the Liaison Committee scrapped. Workers had also observed with considerable interest Numarwosa's problematic strike at Ford in 1979. Up to this point these unions had seen little industrial action. Their main focus had been on gaining company recognition although they were aware of the limitations that recognition alone bestowed upon them. As General Secretary Freddie Sauls observed at the time,

> For UAW the main struggle has been recognition...it is the only union I know of that works on a completely national basis and it has been an achievement to get recognition ... Particularly in the Eastern Cape, there's Ford, General Motors, SKF, Volkswagen, Borg Warner, Goodyear, and CDA is on the brink. Then in Pretoria, there's Sigma and BMW. What other unregistered union in South Africa can claim this achievement?
> But to us recognition on a piece of paper does not mean anything. It is the practical implementation of recognition. Has the shopsteward got the right to facilities? Has the union official outside got the right to represent workers inside?... They allow you to have shopstewards but then the shopstewards are being victimised. For instance, at SKF they came with the argument that the shopstewards can't call the officials from outside to come in, whereas we had agreed in principle with the company, with the former managing director, about that.[6]

Volkswagen workers' grievances were many but the issue of wages certainly loomed large. Unlike Mawu's migrant membership on the East Rand their focus was not primarily aimed at ensuring job security. As previously mentioned Naawu's membership in the Eastern Cape was non-migrant in character. It comprised African and coloured workers the majority of whom lived in townships adjacent to the cities of which the former had secured Section 10 (1) a rights. In an instance of industrial action they could not be endorsed out of the area and lose their jobs and place of abode. Furthermore, Volkswagen workers had achieved union recognition rights, including the right to bargain wages on the Industrial Council. This did not mean that these workers were not vulnerable to dismissal and the loss of status and other privileges and as Sauls has indicated a recognition agreement was only as strong as the union's ability to monitor and implement it. Nevertheless their primary focus was not on that of job security and a place to reside legally in the city.

In the seventies auto companies benchmarked workers' pay levels to the PDL and Volkswagen professed themselves proud to pay a little above that level. Workers contended that breadline wages allowed them to exist, but not to live decently, especially as PDL calculations did not include the purchase of items such as clothing, furniture, school books, entertainment and other everyday expenses that whites took for granted. They resented the calculation of their living costs by academics who were remote from the financial deprivation they suffered and which was not a rate arrived at through negotiation with employers. To counter the PDL baseline rate, workers, before negotiations, drew up their own `living wage` figure based on a survey of workers' needs and arrived at a minimum figure of R2 an hour which they were determined to negotiate themselves.[7] They met resolute resistance, and after weeks of negotiations the union deadlocked on the Automobile Manufacturing Industry Industrial Council for the Eastern Cape. The union demanded that minimum pay be raised from R1.15 to R2 an hour, an increase of almost 75 per cent, whilst employers on the council were offering R1.40 an hour.[8]

On June 15 workers arranged a weekend meeting in Uitenhage's Jubilee Hall to report back on negotiations only to find that Uitenhage's chief magistrate had banned the meeting. Frustrated membership decided to strike the following day, June 16, and to use the opportunity to report back to members on the company premises. The Volkswagen plant was the biggest in the area and 3 500 African and coloured workers downed tools in an illegal strike. The forklift drivers took the lead by parking their forklifts behind the Assembly Hall. Shortly thereafter, workers gathered in front of the Managing Director's office to listen to the thwarted report-back. It was here that workers directed shopstewards to negotiate with top management whilst they waited, fearing a lock-out if they left the company premises.

News of the strike spread rapidly and within days neighbouring motor assembly and components

plants came out in companies such as Goodyear, SKF, Hella, National Standard, Borg Warner, Guestro Industries, UCM Milling and even the local municipality. In effect a general strike erupted in the area prompting a tough reaction from security forces. As Numarwosa organiser Les Kettledas recalls, "The whole town became an operational area. The army was flown in. Barbed wire was put on the streets to keep them from entering into town. Newspapers were blacked out. It was like a war zone."[9] At its height about 10 000 workers from 11 plants downed tools. Violence broke out as police tear-gassed and fired birdshot at workers, and clashed with township youth who came out to support the strikers. Workers at neighbouring auto component plants put forward their demands - Goodyear Tyre workers demanded a R1.10 minimum raise to R3, and workers at Gubbs and Inngs R2.50 from R1.15. Strikes at some plants such as Hella, Goodyear, and SKF where the union had not yet developed strong leadership were dispersed by police using batons, teargas and dogs. These strikes petered out within ten days and a number of strikers were fired.

Union leadership decided to focus on Volkswagen. From day one of the strike, officials were in touch with the IMF and IG Metall (the German metal union) to solicit their support. Critical to the success of the strike was the company's decision to restrain the police from interfering primarily because they knew that the German unions were monitoring the strike closely, and that the Bundestag was currently involved in hearings on German investment in South Africa.[10]

The dispute was finally settled after a three week stoppage through the unusual step of involving an IMF negotiator who flew out from Germany. This resulted in a settlement where workers accepted a R1.48 per hour minimum increase, and employers agreed to increase the minimum to R2 within 18 months. Once UAW/Numarwosa agreed to settle, workers returned to the shopfloor.[11]

The dispute was remarkable for a variety of reasons. Firstly the notion of demanding a living wage was unprecedented. This concept pushed back the industrial relations and political horizons instantly and dramatically. The South African Congress of Trade Union (Sactu) had popularised a similar concept through their minimum wage `Pound-A-Day` campaign in 1958 but this had been a largely symbolic demand.[12] Secondly, it was the first major example of coloured and African worker unity. Apartheid's project had been to divide racial groups. It had systematically separated African and coloured workers who had formerly resided in the same townships. Finally, it was a trial of strength which was unprecedented in South African labour history and remarkable in the context of high apartheid.

The dispute was also remarkable for the unions' disciplined use of power where worker solidarity was sustained over a prolonged period. During the industrial action the company persistently tried

to break workers' unity by leaving open company gates, offering wage increases to those who returned to work, and even going to the lengths of hiring a helicopter to drop leaflets in the neighbouring township promoting their offer. Only fifty workers responded. The strike evolved into a trial of strength continuing for a period of three weeks, unheard of in those days. It was remarkable not only for levels of worker unity, but also for levels of discipline including membership meeting daily in the car park in front of the plant to receive report-backs from negotiators and to make collective decisions. In strike meetings, union membership demonstrated a highly developed tactical sense and utilised all available resources including the Uitenhage Black Civic Organisation in which many UAW shopstewards occupied leadership positions. It became the organisational focus in the townships for the strike holding regular meetings to inform residents of developments, distributing pamphlets, and conducting house visits to prevent scabbing and to solicit financial support for strikers and their families.[13]

Workers' rapid return to the shopfloor after settlement demonstrated the unions' power to bring workers out on strike and bring them back in an equally efficient manner. Volkswagen and a range of employers on the industrial council were left with no doubt that the union was the voice of the workers as they were forced to accept that workers alone, in negotiations with employers, could decide wages. For employers in the Eastern Cape these strikes dealt a blow to the institutions in the bargaining system that employers and government promoted - industrial councils and liaison committees. Some employers tried to negotiate through the liaison committees when the strikes broke out but workers rejected them and companies were forced to admit to these committees' lack of representivity. Without an alternative form of communication with workers they finally came to the realisation that it was time to recognise the unions. In addition, employers noted that the strong shopsteward leadership at Volkswagen had ensured an orderly strike and resolution in a potentially disastrous situation for the companies' continued survival. According to Martheanne[14], Volkswagen was known to be carrying only three weeks' stock at the time and since it was in the lead over the other two car manufacturers (Ford and General Motors) in unit sales this would have left it unable to meet orders.

For ordinary black members at Volkswagen, the strike was genuinely empowering. It gave them more money, but more importantly, for the first time they had experienced the power of a collective voice in the workplace and in society more broadly. When workers, in their victory, marched out of the Volkswagen gates and through white Uitenhage back to the townships, the police did not break up the march. Vuyo Kwinana, a Volkswagen union activist, felt a rush of power, "We are commanding. *We* are commanding. The workers are commanding now. No more the police or the Labour Relations Department." Another worker recalled the strike as a turning point in factory relations, "If the master said `Do that`, you used to run to do that without

questioning *why*... They don't like that *why*... If he says, `Go there and do that`, we could not, before 1980 ask him,`Why?` Now he must explain *why* he sends me there, because I'm working here."[15]

The power of worker unity, coloured and African workers together, sustained by regular strike meetings where workers discussed and took responsibility for tactics adopted, were lessons not lost on workers. Naawu thereafter waged a number of successful actions around issues such as disciplinary and retrenchment procedures; protection from supervisor attacks; wage increases; the reinstatement of victimised shopstewards; pension rights and retrenchment, and over the introduction of new technology. Soon after the 1980 strike, Volkswagen became the first workplace in South Africa to win the right to full-time shopstewards - these were workers paid by the company to devote their time to dealing with union matters. By 1984 Volkswagen had five full-time, and 26 part-time shopstewards who were permitted one hour a day to execute shopsteward duties.[16]

By October 1980 Uitenhage had become a "Fosatu town" and a number of plants were negotiating outside of the Industrial Council system at factory level. This, together with the new Wiehahn laws, signalled the end of racially defined parallel unions. Workers at a tyre plant, for example, chased away Micwu organisers who were attempting to recruit African members. Coloured workers left established unions to join Numarwosa, Engineering Industrial Workers Union members complained that their union did not hold membership meetings.[17] News of the strike at Volkswagen spread rapidly in union circles countrywide. Fosatu's Erwin commented that, "The strike was the first in which giving workers a say ate into company profits. It showed that recognition gave workers new confidence and power."[18] *Fosatu Worker News* noted that, "These increases are the largest achieved by the union but more important the companies accepted that a reasonable living wage must be paid."[19] The strike was notable for the tactical sophistication demonstrated by workers and their leadership and for the boldness of the demands that they put forward. In contrast, the employer's clumsiness in dealing with the unions despite its German owner's long familiarity with unions at home, was noticeable. It was indeed, through this strike, that the notion of a `living wage` was born, a concept that would guide union bargaining agendas for years to come. Both Fosatu and Cosatu used the Living Wage as a bargaining goal and Cosatu adopted a Living Wage Campaign as part of its militant programme of action in 1986.

On the face of it the strike was unplanned. It arose out of the spontaneous anger of workers thwarted in their attempts to attend a report-back on the progress of Industrial Council wage negotiations which had deadlocked after their living wage demand of R2 was rejected. Volkswagen's Industrial Relations Director, Ollie Rademeyer, believed that the unions had long

prepared for the strike to co-incide with June 16 commemorations but union leaders were adamant that whilst there were rumours of a strike no plans had been made. As one Volkswagen worker remarked, "Well as a member, an ordinary member, I just went on strike in support of what we want, because the most important thing was then money. So as a member I did give my full support to that strike then... Everybody did take part ..."[20]

Spontaneous yes, yet the strike was a culmination of nearly a decade of union organisation in Volkswagen where solidarity between coloured and African workers in Numarwosa and UAW, and a depth of shopfloor organisation and leadership, had been carefully forged. The unity between African and coloured workers in Volkswagen was unusual and was a result of a number of factors including residential, social and shopfloor contact. In Uitenhage, coloured and African people had resided together in Kabah township since the 1840s and social relations had continued despite large numbers of coloureds moving into the adjacent more developed townships of Gerald Smith, Thomas Gamble, Rosedale, and Jubilee Park. The Nationalist government had attempted to separate coloured and African residents in Kabah from the 1960s onwards but this was never particularly successful and social interaction continued. This was reinforced by strong sporting links between African and coloured men in these townships, particularly on the rugby field. By contrast Grand Apartheid segregation was much more successful in the Port Elizabeth townships and the 1955 removals of Africans from the centrally located and integrated Korsten meant that coloured and African people were completely separated from each other and social interaction was minimal. Thus workers in Port Elizabeth factories such as Ford and General Motors did not forge the same cross-racial solidarity on the shopfloor. At Volkswagen the continuous social interaction between coloured and African workers enabled the reverse. This factor combined with an African leadership which had close links into the ANC and PAC underground resulted in a level of union organisation not witnessed in other auto factories in the area. This was evidenced during the 1980 disputes where failed strike action at Goodyear across the road from Volkswagen and at components factories elsewhere in Uitenhage where union organisation was either weak or non-existent, contrasted sharply with Volkswagen workers' success.[21]

Furthermore the foundations for international solidarity which was an important pressure on management during the strike had been carefully laid in the 1970s. Tenzer outlines that, "Apart from assisting the independent trade unions in obtaining financial aid and shopsteward training , IG Metall's main concern was to bring West German companies with subsidiaries in South Africa to recognise black trade unions and to observe the same minimum standards of trade union rights they granted at home."[22] Ties with IG Metall and the IMF had been further strengthened by John Gomomo, a Volkswagen shopsteward, who had been sent on a European tour by management to observe industrial relations in Britain, Belgium and Germany in which latter case, he had forged

strong links.[23] In addition, in the approach to the 1980 Industrial Council negotiations the unions had undertaken careful preparation which led them on a collision course with management. Before pay talks they had conducted their own survey of worker needs out of which grew their `living wage` demand of R2 an hour. Strong factory organisation coupled with a carefully formulated new approach to pay talks had raised workers' expectations that some form of showdown where they might win their demands was inevitable. This was reinforced by the knowledge that a string of small stoppages in different areas of the factory had resulted in improvements for workers shortly before the strike. On 23 May, for example, a stoppage occurred in the Side Panel area over a disciplinary case. Three days later 160 forklift drivers struck and demanded an upgrade and wage increase. Workers in the Trim, Cut, and Sew department also stopped work employing the same demand. All three cases resulted in favourable settlements for workers.[24]

Nevertheless the unions and membership were still not prepared for the scale of the strike, and the union leadership's experience and ability to extemporise was to prove of critical importance. The unfolding of the strike was a dynamic of spontaneous worker response and of union officials responding to the exigencies of the moment. Union leadership met far into the night to plan for the strike, phoning IMF and IG Metall to solicit support, and advised shopstewards on what they might expect to happen on the basis of some important lessons they had learned in the 1979 Ford strike. They were fully conscious of the element of surprise and of utilising the tactic of putting pressure on management whilst negotiating. They were also acutely aware that the company was operating in a booming market and would never be able to meet orders if they dismissed workers. Volkswagen's Ollie Rademayer observed that, "If we'd had fired them, we know that we would have had to rehire the same people, because they were skilled. We'd given those people skills. There were no other skilled people in Uitenhage..."[25]

Workers put visible pressure on management as they assembled on the lawns in front of the Director's office and carefully selected shopstewards to negotiate with top management. Management in response, in a gross misjudgement of the situation, sent out their labour relations manager. Angry strikers surrounded him and started to hit him. As Kwinana recounts, "We didn't want our complaints channelled through them [labour relations department]. We want channels through our shopstewards and to the top management, because we wanted a direct reply."[26] Top management was forced to meet with union shopstewards and negotiate.

During the strike workers learnt some significant lessons about the wielding of collective power. Many workers spoke of how their first instinct was to confront the white power structures head on. Older, more experienced activists (described in Chapter 2) however, who had learnt from past struggles in the ANC, SACTU and PAC, combined with the pragmatism of experienced

Numarwosa officials, educated members around the dangers of undisciplined action. Brian Fredericks, a Numarwosa official, noted that if the shopsteward leadership had not been in close touch with workers, "... the situation would have been uncontrollable."[27]

A difficult choice that the unions had to take during the course of the strike was on where to concentrate their resources in a situation where a host of auto and components factories were joining the dispute. The union leadership decided to concentrate their resources on Volkswagen where they felt they had the greatest chance of success. As Numarwosa's Freddie Sauls explained,

> Basically the strategy was to hold the strike together. The strategy was to keep the pressures on management, to keep the leadership together at all times... So we couldn't do it at Volkswagen and analyse the situation on a day to day with Goodyear. It would be impossible, because the only two guys who where basically directly involved were myself and Brian Fredericks. Fredericks to deal with the press and myself to deal with the committee, as such. Now, we couldn't do it for all of the companies, and we had to say, 'Look, Volkswagen is the target, the key plant, and we've got to hold the plant together."[28]

There is no doubt that this concentrated focus of resources on the Volkswagen dispute was decisive in winning workers' demands, but this strategic decision was not without its losses. Goodyear membership accused Numarwosa of being a sell-out and ultimately union activists went over to Macwusa, the rival black consciousness union.[29]

Thus it was that the actions of a magistrate led to a strike that challenged established apartheid constructs. The living wage demand assailed the very basis of racial capitalism in South Africa which was the subjugation of the indigenous black population in order to ensure a continuous supply of cheap black labour. This oppressed group was now beginning to demand its share of South Africa's wealth. The assertion of power by black workers was also in itself a profound challenge to the apartheid system. Far from demonstrating submission to the white man, workers were fearlessly asserting an insidious power which was not exercised through the barrel of a gun and thus could not be dealt with by brute force. In the process of this assertion of power workers were also challenging concepts of racial inferiority. Management and the white citizens of Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth were forced to concede that uneducated workers were waging a highly strategised and sophisticated action. Furthermore the basis of workers' power rested on their unity and this solidarity was forged in defiance of racially legislated divisions between African and coloured workers. Finally black workers simply dispensed with apartheid institutions which governed so much of their lives. Such institutions as liaison committees, racially segregated trade unions, and industrial councils were bypassed and replaced by a more direct means of attaining wage increases.

Pension strike wave 1980

In the same year as the Volkswagen strike, an equally significant wave of industrial action occurred. These strikes which rolled across much of the country were particularly numerous in Natal and the Eastern Cape, and revolved around the government's pension policy. This challenge from the shopfloor shifted the focus from struggles at the point of production, wages in the case of the Uitenhage strikes, to broader social welfare issues which eroded managements' frontiers of control in the workplace.

In the climate of government reform in the late 1970s many employers began setting up pension funds for black workers, including migrants, to augment the tiny state pension of R66 every two months. Growth in the black population and the intensifying fiscal crisis faced by the state in the latter part of the 1970s placed even this small state pension under threat and the government proposed an alternative to the state's pension scheme whereby government, employers and workers would all pay into a joint fund allowing for larger payouts. The plan elicited a storm of protest from the pension industry, in particular from Afrikaner business who enjoyed close links to the government, and who saw large amounts of money disappearing from private funds into the new scheme. The idea was quickly abandoned by government. In its place it set up a committee to seek alternative solutions and in March 1980 it recommended `preservation`, a plan to prevent workers from withdrawing their contributions to pension funds on leaving a job and obliging them to leave their money in the old or new company scheme until 65 years of age. In 1981 the Preservation of Pensions Bill was introduced into the House of Assembly. The new measure was justified by government and employers alike as a way to ensure that workers did not squander their money and leave themselves without provision for their old age. Its hidden agenda was to ensure a stable pool of money from which both government and capital could freely borrow and invest and which would take a large part of the burden of pension provision from government's shoulders - especially as many workers died before this age. One particular part of this agenda was more hidden and more sinister than the rest and this was the requirement for prescribed assets.[30] All pension schemes were required by law to invest a percentage of their contributions in government bonds. What this implied was only subsequently discovered by the union movement and will be discussed later. For understandable and generally sound historic reasons, black South African workers were suspicious about any measure, however ostensibly well meaning, to appropriate any part of their incomes. A rolling strike ensued which extended unevenly to different parts of the country, which voiced a single demand - that employers pay out pension money before the Bill became law. In late 1980, 400 unorganised workers struck at Tubatse Ferrochrome in the Eastern Transvaal to demand the refund of their pension money. By February 1981 organised workers in the Eastern Cape were militantly making the same demand. Three strikes broke out including one at Firestone. Militant action spread to Natal, and during 1981 at least 30 000 workers came out on

strike in 27 companies countrywide and thousands of workers were fired for striking.[31] As Dumisane Mbanjwa a Mawu member in a Natal company at the time and later an organiser recalls,

> There was very serious concern amongst the people in my plant at Huletts Aluminium. You look at pension fund as a provision that when you leave work you could actually live on that lump sum payment and it could substitute the UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund]. So we did not quite agree with the government taking that kind of a decision particularly the fact that the MD of the company was the chairperson of that group of people that made the decision.
>
> So we organised around that issue. We managed to get majority membership and at the same time Mawu was making advances to get recognition. So the company had a series of workshops with workers and in those workshops they were informing workers why the pension fund had to be operated in that way. Then the company decided that because workers were not keen on buying the story that whoever wanted to take his or her money from the pension fund should do so... But then at some point the company realised that almost everyone was beginning to withdraw their monies so they had to start tactics to stop people.
>
> We started having meetings at a community centre in `Maritzburg where we explained this law to people. Then workers came out on strike, 80 per cent of workers went out and the plant was almost at a standstill. The company developed complex tactics to break the strike They started influencing workers to come to our meetings so that they could break the strike. So there were pressures from these people who wanted to go back because of this management strategy. Eventually we had to agree on a compromise to say people who wanted to go back should go back. And that broke the strike.
>
> One thing that they did was to send a person with a camera into our meeting who posed as a *Sunday Times* newspaper reporter. This woman reporter gave us credentials which was false obviously, and I think we made a big mistake by accepting her because we were inexperienced at that point. Eventually we found that this woman was not from *Sunday Times* and she took all the pictures of us and things that we were saying in the meeting. And when the time came for selection or workers to re-hire all the pictures were in the office of the personal department. And we were all out there with our fists up and chanting.
>
> Management then set up tables, different departments, and asked individuals to go to their supervisors to explain why they were out, and to make sure that they are going to comply with the rules of the company as soon as they are re-employed. So about 75 per cent of workers were taken back, but there was a group of workers who were not taken back and I was part of that group. ..We never even qualified for interviews. We just heard from other workers: `Do not even waste your time because your pictures are at the front'... So about 25 per cent of the employees never managed to come back... half of the group were the activists, the leadership amongst workers.[32]

In the Transvaal, the pensions dispute further fuelled workers' suspicions of the metal industrial council which they felt operated in employers' and white unions' interests alone. They discovered that the industrial council pension fund had a clause preventing workers from withdrawing money before retirement and that Seifsa, who fully backed the new bill, was preventing employers from refunding pension monies. At the Defy Corporation in Durban, Seifsa refused to let the company pay out pension monies despite the company agreeing with the union, Saawu, to do so. When Seifsa finally agreed to relax its position on the preservation clause, it insisted that workers wait

for six months before being paid out because it argued that on retrenchment, UIF paid the worker out for a six month period.[33]

The strikes took the unions by surprise; Fosatu and its affiliates only took up the issue when rising discontent amongst members in Natal in all affiliates forced some response. As University of the Witwatersrand academic, Philip Bonner recalls, "Most Fosatu unions at the time were absorbed in recognition and wage issues. They viewed the pensions uproar initially as a distraction and with bewilderment. Among other things they realised that this would lead them into a confrontation with the state at a point when they were unprepared to undertake it."[34] It was only late in 1981 that Fosatu released its pension demands on behalf of its affiliate members. Once it grasped the emotive force that the issue generated it made a sustained effort to understand it. A three way dialogue developed between organisers and shopstewards, and between organisers and sympathetic pensions experts. Fosatu, for example, commissioned Bonner to research the issue. He compiled worker complaints from shopsteward meetings and researched the issue, which he claims "... permitted the definition of demands and the formulation of a powerful and persuasive opposing point of view. In the interim an exceptionally productive dialectic emerged." He produced Fosatu's first report on the issue in November 1981 entitled *Pensions Panic*.

Fosatu's report outlined that for white workers, with little fear of redundancy, pension money was not a means of survival, whereas African workers often faced long periods without work and pension monies became a means of survival between jobs. The government's UIF paid less than half the worker's wage for six months and very often migrant workers did not receive their pension payout because in the homelands pensioners were paid monthly, not in a lump sum, and often the cheques did not reach them. Money paid out from company pension funds followed an equally problematic route because it was usually sent to the local magistrate's or black affairs commissioner's office, or to the nearest trading store in the home area. This involved workers in long distance travel, where often, after queuing, they were informed that the money had not arrived. It also emerged that workers were concerned about the lengthy qualifying period in company funds where they only received the employer's contribution if they had worked in the same company for at least ten years. For many this was unlikely as they were liable to dismissal or retrenchment long before this. Even if they qualified they feared that private pension payouts would be less than the state pension because it was based on workers' earnings which were minimal. In addition, membership of a company fund could disqualify the worker from a state pension. Finally, most African men's life expectancy was considerably lower than 65 years and although their families could claim the money, few family members knew this, and fund administrators did not conduct education programmes to inform members and their kin.[35]

It was in the process of this research that Fosatu discovered what was hidden behind the prescribed assets requirement. All pension schemes were required by law to invest 53 per cent of their contributions in government bonds, a considerable sum in an industry worth over R10 billion. On investigation it transpired that much of this investment went towards the purchase of military equipment and munitions for the South African Defence Force. This was obviously in direct opposition to the political aspirations of black workers who were unwittingly bolstering the very regime that oppressed them. In consequence Fosatu argued that prescribed assets should be abandoned and workers, through representation on Pension Boards, should have the say over where their pension monies were invested.[36]

Initially most employers resisted workers' demands and presented them with harsh ultimatums. They were offended that their liberal initiative to incorporate Africans into company pension funds was rejected. They insisted that the government Bill was good for African workers, and that being new to pension schemes, workers did not understand them. They showed no inclination to investigate grievances, and frequently resorted to mass firings. But the dismissal of workers failed to end the strikes, while Fosatu's critique made employers realise that workers' fears had deep roots and not even mass sackings would alter this. A number of companies capitulated and paid out thousands of rands in pension monies. The Durban Chamber of Commerce urged the government to delay the Bill for three years to give time to educate workers. After a meeting between employers and the Department of Manpower, Minister Pietie Du Plessis agreed to this. Workers however saw this as a strategy to introduce the Act through the back door and the strikes continued. The FCI urged the government to abandon the Bill and it finally agreed.[37] Soon after the prescribed assets requirement was also dropped. Through representations to government and business the unions had forced the state to withdraw a Bill that it was intent on passing.

The union leadership themselves, had initially been surprised by workers' robust response. Yet it showed itself able to both respond, and to deepen workers' demands taking them to their logical conclusion. Workers' unorchestrated actions opened up vistas of possibility to union and federation strategists. They looked beyond the immediate demand to return pension monies and perceived that the deeper agenda for the state and capital was the ability for accumulated pension funds to strengthen the white economy at a time when government and business were desperate for investment capital. Pension monies contributed a large percentage of available investment capital. They constituted a gigantic lever of economic and political power. Suddenly all of this was brought clearly into view, in the manner that Tarrow describes that social movements deepen understandings and demands, "Movements do passionate 'framing work' shaping grievances into broader and more resonant claims."[38] Strategic thinkers in the unions formulated a Fosatu pension policy which urged negotiations between unions and employers on the larger issue of pension

reform. The policy noted that workers had no say on the boards that controlled pension funds where in the main a white company official spoke on behalf of black workers without any consideration for their interests. Inevitably employers used this investment capital in their own interests to purchase items such as machines and technology that could replace workers rather than investment in social benefits that would enhance workers' standard of living. The Fosatu pension policy asserted that workers should control their own pension monies and it launched a campaign to demand worker majority representation on provident fund and pension boards.[39]

Fosatu's demands influenced employers. The Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce released a pension policy supporting the idea of worker representation on pension fund boards - but not a worker majority. The Chamber also urged companies to negotiate with unions on pension policy, and suggested that pension funds should invest in township upgrading rather than in boosting government stocks. But unions were demanding a significant shift in the power to influence major economic resources. They demanded that their members be allowed to control millions of rand, a demand which alarmed employers who protested that this was a call for inegalitarian socialism because if they contributed half the money to the pension fund they should have at least half the say in how the money was utilised. [40]

Mawu and Naawu were amongst the unions who actively took up this pension campaign, partly because a large number of their workers had been involved in pension strikes. It was in the process of investigating the matter that Mawu discovered that Seifsa had two racially constituted pension funds, and that black workers had no say over their own fund.[41] In consequence Mawu demanded that Seifsa employers agree to restructure the Metal Industries Pension Fund Board to allow for majority worker representation, "Surely the workers have more right to decide what to do with their money which has grown to millions of rands in the pension fund?"[42] they argued. In 1982 the fund was worth R 586 million and in 1982 alone the membership of 291 000 had contributed R188 million alone.[43] It was a demand that Seifsa quickly rejected. Long after the government had dropped the Bill however, Mawu remained in dispute with employers, slowly gnawing away at their control over the funds. In 1983 union demands forced Seifsa to agree to change the rules of the fund so that workers who left the industry could claim their pension money after six months. Mawu also succeeded in removing the white only unions from the metal pension board arguing that all white unions such as Yster and Staal and the Amalgamated Engineering Union had no right to adjudicate a fund where they had no members. This argument resulted in agreement by board members that only the biggest unions, with fund members, could have votes on the board.[44]

Together with unions such as the CWIU and WPGWU, Mawu continued the fight to win union representation on pension boards in proportion to their numbers - a worker majority. Mawu won

representation on the metal board but not a worker majority because an alliance of employer and white union votes blocked their demands. Nevertheless, African metal workers now had a say over assets worth R800 million. In 1984 Mawu called for workers' pension money to be invested in community development while the union's mainly migrant membership demanded that the metal fund contribute to housing in a rural area. White unions blocked the demand claiming that this would endanger the fund's financial health, and reduce employees' pension benefits but the board finally agreed to invest money in the KwaZulu Development Corporation for workers' housing.[45] In Naawu's case the campaign around worker representation and control of pension funds, for example, helped to end a 13 year battle at Leyland. Naawu's Joe Foster explained,

> The company attempted to introduce a pension scheme in 1973 but this was opposed by the union because we had no say in it. For a period of about two or three years they were not able to introduce it. Eventually the union changed its stance. We said that we would continue the fight for control from within. Towards the end of last year [1985] we threatened to pull out of the fund unless the rules were amended to allow for equal representation. On March 14 these rules were finally changed.[46]

Mawu and Naawu continued to investigate the pension issue in search of a more favourable vehicle to serve their members' interests. Fosatu's original research had produced the possibility of the introduction of a more flexible provident fund to replace pension funds. This was the alternative that it now presented to employers. Naawu's Taffy Adler explained, "Pension funds are essentially good for people in service for a long time or have a high income. A more suitable vehicle is a provident fund where workers get their contributions and the employer's contribution in a lump sum when they leave the company - no matter what the reasons are for leaving."[47] If workers remained in the company the lump sum was available at the retirement age of 55 years. It took time for employers to accept, and negotiate provident funds, but the idea proliferated amongst Fosatu unions and became a standard demand in the eighties. In 1986 the *SA Metalworker* reported on Naawu's provident negotiations with BMW,

> After lengthy negotiations with Naawu, a new provident fund which gives workers greater control over the affairs and rules of the fund has been introduced at BMW. A major feature of the fund, which replaced BMW's pension fund, is that workers and management have equal representation on both the Board of Trustees and on the fund's Management Committee.
>
> Three worker representatives will sit on the Board of Trustees ... In this way workers will be able to control the daily affairs of the fund as well as any changes to its rules and constitution. Workers will contribute 6,5% of wages and the employer 6, 75%. Other benefits of the fund are: a member can choose to retire at any time after the age of 55, and he/she will be paid a lump sum of employer and employee contributions with interest; in the case of ill-health or permanent disability where a worker is forced to leave work, he/she will be paid both employer and employee contributions....[48]

Worker power had forced the state and capital to abandon a proposed Act and related prescribed assets and had thereby created a space for the creation of a more meaningful unemployment and retirement provision. A transition to provident funds and worker representation on pension boards

was a far cry from strikers' original demand for the return of their pension money before an Act came into place. But with input from union and federation researchers and strategic thinkers, membership embraced the logic of these demands and threw its weight into realising them. This was an unprecedented victory and one which again fractured the apartheid mould. For membership, underlying their support for these demands, was the principle of transparent consultation and workers' control. Both employers and government treated black workers like children who needed adult instruction. Winning representation on pension boards returned the adult voice to black workers who were denied this both in the apartheid workplace and elsewhere. The pension issue was one which shifted workers' demands beyond the domain of the factory whilst pushing back the frontiers of control in both the workplace and apartheid society more generally. It demonstrated the possibility of utilising worker power to shift state policy. It was also an issue that allowed these unions to enter the terrain of restructuring the economy, an arena to which they would later return.

East Rand Strike Wave 1981 - 1982

Introduction

The 1980 strike at Volkswagen reverberated round the country. Details of how the strike was conducted and the nature of demands made, were communicated through the press and through national Fosatu structures to affiliates who sat on its NEC (National Executive Committee) thereby demonstrating the power of its national structures to rapidly communicate, and educate, union leadership. In turn, leadership reported back within their own structures and membership learnt of the R2 living wage demand. On the East Rand, where nearly 80 per cent of the iron, steel and engineering industry was located, and which constituted the centre of Mawu's activities, news of this demand fell on fertile ground. News of the Uitenhage strikes however was by no means the only stimulus to action when an unprecedented wave of strikes hit the East Rand in early 1981. These were strikes which were to have significant organisational consequences for the union.

The strikes took the form of a range of different actions but all were wildcat in nature. In Hyman's definition this is an unofficial strike which originates in spontaneous action of rank and file workers that is not formally recognized by the Executive Committee of the union and official union authorisation generally follows later. On the East Rand, Mawu lent its support wherever possible to these illegal strikes and this support served to encourage further actions which led to what Hyman has called 'cumulative disorder'.[49] Short demonstration stoppage or 'downers' taken within the confines of the factory floor were common and their primary purpose was to call attention to the urgency of workers' feelings of grievance. In such stoppages strikers are generally willing to return to work to allow for negotiations to take place often before concrete concessions have been offered.[50] The tactic of "working to rule" whereby workers protest by conforming

strictly to the letter of their job description was notably absent however. This absence told a story in itself; there were no specified 'rules' to begin with. Both Hyman and Tarrow[51] assert the effectiveness of the wildcat strike because management has little opportunity to plan its response in contrast to the formal notice given in an official dispute. Tarrow, writing of the North American labour movement, laments how the official strike has become 'defanged' and believes that only the spontaneous wildcat action which operates independently of union bureaucracies is truly useful for winning concessions on the shopfloor.

Not all spontaneous actions were successful however despite Tarrow's admiration for this form of action. In many cases workers, especially in instances of higher wage demands, returned to work not having won anything and frequent dismissals took place, sometimes of whole workforces. In the face of such risks workers' actions may have appeared irrational. Hyman however asserts that strike action is never irrational and that even where workers know they cannot win a demand "... the opportunity to release tensions accumulated in an oppressive work situation gives many apparently irrational walk-outs a convincing rationale."[52] Workers too, if not dismissed, knew the effect of a past strike on future negotiations with management whether the strike was won or not. As the Donovan Commission on trade union action noted in Britain in 1968, "It is also necessary to take into account the effect on management of the fear of the possibility of strikes even if they do not take place."[53]

Outbreak of East Rand strikes

There had been rumblings of dissatisfaction for some time prior to the strikes on the East Rand and a few disputes should be mentioned here because of their role in stoking up discontent.

In May 1980 Mawu workers at Rely Precision in Boksburg struck against management's arbitrary powers of dismissal. An unsupervised worker doing overtime at 5.45 in the morning experienced a problem with the steel he was cutting and went to seek the induna's observation in case things went wrong. He was seen by the works manager, who dismissed him for not being at his work post despite his having been continuously employed by the company for 15 years. News of the injustice spread rapidly and Rely workers came out on a spontaneous, illegal strike assembling outside the Director's office, and demanding an explanation whilst singing, raising their fists, and shouting `Amandla`. The works manager addressed strikers but senior management refused to meet with them when they requested a hearing and ordered them back to work, an instruction which they refused to obey. As Makhoba recounts "He then left. We sent him away with shouts of Amandla! We stood firm and started singing again. The singing built up our feeling of solidarity and made us aware of our strength."[54] Alarmed, when strikers would not disperse, the company summoned the police. After a vicious attack they arrested all striking workers who subsequently spent the night in

jail. Represented by a union lawyer they, "... all appeared in the court the same morning... We foundry workers stood together in our boots and overalls, still dirty from the sand and dust of the foundry... Some of us had the foundry man's leather apron on. Others wore their safety glasses."[55] They were charged with an illegal strike - a charge which was later dropped.

The company would not re-engage the strikers but the union refused to let the issue die. It assisted dismissed workers to produce a play about their experiences which was performed all over the East Rand touting a message of union power, and making workers in the region keenly aware of the dispute and of the role of the new trade unions. The union also assisted strikers in taking up a case against the Minister of Police and two years later, they won monetary compensation. Makhoba explained the significance of this victory, "The money helps but the victory helps the metal workers' struggle even more. Since then the SAP [South African Police] have not beaten us on the East Rand because they do not want to pay again."[56] It appeared that management had won the day but Rely struggled to find an experienced workforce after the dismissals, "They could not find good foundry workers because people were scared of the fires and the work was too hard."[57] and were forced to recall many of the dismissed into their previous jobs. Stewart records that a year later efficiency levels of migrant worker could not be attained by the urban labour replacements and he felt it "was doubtful if Long Steel [Rely Precision] will again be prepared to dismiss en masse experienced foundry workers."[58] Looking back on the dispute, the Rely workers believed their strike was the first in the spate of strikes which broke out the following year, "Our struggle at Rely was important... We showed how even a small group of workers can stand up against the bosses. Our strike was the first in our big strike wave which hit the East Rand."[59]

Shortly before the main wave of strikes began in late June 1981, Mawu won two other important victories on the East Rand. Vaal Metal Pressings and Hendler & Hendler agreed to hold referenda to test worker support for the union. In both companies workers gave their majority support to Mawu. Hendler & Hendler began to discuss pay with shopstewards outside the industrial council. These two cases represented a growing trend for employers to agree that they test union support in worker ballots. Seifsa however soon issued guidelines telling companies to reject referenda. Disputes in East Rand companies in other Fosatu unions also set the tone of militant struggle. A strike at Colgate in Boksburg, a CWIU factory, in which workers waged a successful struggle around the right to bargain outside the industrial council, was a powerful example to workers. The dispute involved a boycott of Colgate products which made the struggle widely known to migrant workers on the East Rand. Colgate shopstewards addressed mass meetings where they recounted their struggles with the company and urged workers to resist councils. Their victory gave workers in other factories the confidence to take up their own issues.[60]

In Moses Mayekiso's recollection however it was a strike in an engineering factory that sparked metal workers off, "There was this factory - Hall Longmore - where the workers decided to demand 10 cents over and above the Industrial Council offer. They went out on strike and they won. When other workers in other factories heard about this, they also began demanding increases and this was the beginning of the wave of strikes that took place on the East Rand - it started in Wadeville and spread to Benoni, Alrode and Isando."[61] Soon after 2 000 workers at Salcast Smelter in Benoni struck in support of pay demands, following which about 1 500 workers at Hendler & Hendler stopped work. Over the next months, metal workers militantly downed tools at companies such as EMI, Henred Fruehauf, GEM Industries, Vaal Metals, Telephone Manufacturers of South Africa (TMSA), Scaw Metals, Gundle Plastics, Auto Industrial, Mine Steel Products, Anso Metals, L& F Metter, Power Steel, Dorbyl, TM Foundries, Nickel Chrome, Automated Plating, Boksburg Foundry and many others. In the five months from July to November 1981, more than fifty strikes took place on the East Rand involving about 25 000 workers. Metal workers stood at the centre of this struggle in which 11 per cent of the total work force in the metal industry on the East Rand took part.[62]

Many of these metal strikers were migrant workers who lived in East Rand townships such as Tembisa, Vosloosrus, Katlehong, mainly in hostels falling under the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB). There was great excitement as workers everywhere on the East Rand talked, discussed, told stories on buses, trains, street corners, in shops and most commonly, in hostels. As one worker recalls, "Groups of people would gather at night and discuss the latest news. Each had a story to tell. Each worker was giving his own sermon, some angry, some laughing. Talk mixed excitedly with song. It was like the Zion churches. And all the strikers were Christian soldiers."[63] Hostels became pillars of union strength and the mood of tension and excitement was increased when unknown arsonists set fire to the Fosatu Benoni offices in strikes July - offices where Mawu was based on the East Rand.[64]

Strike Grievances

Strike grievances varied although there were clear trends including a marked difference in the focus of demands between the 1981 and 1982 strike waves. Low wages was one of the largest of these grievances. From 1980 onwards food prices had steadily escalated. Bread prices increased by 40 percent, house rents by 30 per cent, and hostel rents by 70 percent. Real wages had been falling steadily since 1979 when average African wages in manufacturing fell below the Supplemented Living Level calculated by Bureau of Market Research.[65] Contract workers, who constituted 30 per cent of East Rand workers, were sandwiched between the poverty in the homelands, exacerbated by a terrible drought that ravaged first KwaZulu and then spread to other rural areas, and the meagre wages they were receiving from their urban employment.

Simultaneously ERAB was strictly implementing influx control laws, particularly for workers living in shacks.[66] Many migrants were forced out of the cities swelling the numbers of unemployed in the impoverished homelands. Numerous strikes broke out after the release of the new metal industrial council agreement - or `government wage increase` as workers called it, in July 1981. The agreement set a new minimum of R1.13 per hour, a 20- 23 per cent increase on the previous year well below the current inflation rate which for black workers stood at about 30 per cent.[67] A worker poet on the East Rand at the time sang this lament,

> Benoni, Boksburg, Springs, Egoli,
> we make you rich.
> We hostel people make you rich.
> You send us back home to die with empty
> pockets,
> empty dreams and dust in our lungs,
> chopped-off hands and your machines grinding
> in our brain. [68]

The right of the metal industrial council to set wages for the metal industry went to the root of the union's battle for power. By demanding increases above the council rates, Mawu was challenging the council's right to set wages and by doing this was challenging the right of the white establishment to control African workers' lives. Seifsa initially instructed metal companies to resist demands for increases, and although a few companies broke ranks and offered improved wages above council rates, in most cases strikers returned to work without winning increases. But the continuing strikes put enormous pressure on employers forcing Seifsa to shift its position into recognising that "It would have to become more responsive to the shopfloor if it were to survive."[69] It therefore began to urge companies to recognise unions who agreed to join the Council, but to negotiate grievance and disciplinary issues at factory level.

This was a significant gain since it spoke to other deeply felt grievances held by workers. In over half the strikes demands had centred around questions of management control. As outlined in Chapter Three, a major concern for migrants was security and a reduction of vulnerability both in the workplace and outside of it. Migrant workers thus struck around a range of issues that lay at the heart of the apartheid workplace and which had in the past fallen into what was termed managements' terrain - unfair dismissals, arbitrary retrenchment, unjust and arbitrary treatment by foremen, shift changes and increased workloads. These were the issues that in contrast to the wage strikes where workers won little, strikers secured many concessions and pushed back the frontiers of control. In the relay adjusting department of Telephone Manufacturers of South Africa (TMSA) workers went on strike because they considered production demands were too heavy. Management conceded and changed the production schedule. At Mine Steel Products in Boksburg workers were dismissed after refusing to carry an extra heavy load and after a brief strike the company backed down and reinstated the workers. At Scaw Metals, an Anglo American factory, six workers were

dismissed for refusing to join the closed shop enjoyed by the Iron Moulders Society (IMS) preferring to join the union of their choice. They were reinstated after a strike, and permitted to join Mawu.[70] This marked the beginning of a process of progressively wresting control from metal capitalists over the next decade which in Mawu's case embraced the long-term socialist goal of workers taking control of the means of production. As Hyman has remarked, "Integral to any theory of encroaching control is the conception of social revolution as a process rather than as an act... they emphasise the possibility and even the necessity of inroads *within* capitalism as a basis of eventual transition to socialism."[71]

Dismissals were a major cause of strikes. About 25 metal strikes concerned firings, many of them seen by migrants as arbitrary without a known cause. Workers struck out at the arbitrary and capricious behaviour of white foreman. More than half of these strikes ended in the reinstatement of workers. Sometimes workers struck over the dismissal of union leadership, as at Boksburg Foundry. Sometimes they struck over the dismissal of fellow workers - at TMSA workers struck over the dismissal of three workers, who were off duty and playing cards. On another occasion at TM Foundries workers struck to demand the dismissal of a foreman to which the company acquiesced. At Vaal Metals, Boksburg Foundry, and Nickel Chrome, workers successfully demanded the dismissal of worker representatives who had been 'bought off' by management. Managements faced with an increasingly powerful Mawu, now desperately tried to co-opt union leadership using tactics such as offering promotion to the chairman of the shopstewards committee, or sending union representatives on special company training schemes.[72]

Striking home against institutionalised racism in the workplace, workers frequently downed tools in protest against the racism of white foremen. These took the form of mainly verbal conflict, but at times erupted into physical violence where the black worker was inevitably blamed and dismissed without a hearing. At Scaw Metals a fight between a black worker and a white foreman led to the dismissal of a number of workers which resulted in a four day strike to demand reinstatement. Management took them back and issued a warning to Seifsa employers that companies could "no longer get away with dismissing a black worker when he assaulted a foreman who called him 'kaffir`[73]." [74] Ironically, or perhaps, inevitably, white workers' racism escalated during the strikes as managements, faced with black militancy, were forced to make concessions. Membership of extreme white right-wing racist groups increased on the East Rand. Shopstewards now increasingly by-passed their immediate supervisors and appealed to top management in cases of official warnings and dismissals. This alarmed whites in lower supervisory positions who saw militant workers, who were already moving into a number of jobs previously reserved for whites, insisting on grievance procedures which were policed by shopstewards committees, and who were progressively undermining their supervisory control.[75]

As Christmas 1981 approached, employers were hopeful that the break would operate as a cooling off period. However a severe drought in the homelands only served to further fuel workers' anger and desperation. Migrants returned to work in 1982 as the South African economy was rapidly sliding into deeper recession. Retrenchments were common, inflation escalated and Wadeville soon became a war zone as strikes broke out in February, March and April. The 1982 strike wave was more widespread than of the previous year, and most strikes occurred in the metal industry. In Wadeville alone 14 000 workers struck prompting Andrew Zulu, a Mawu shopsteward and Fosatu Vice President, to exclaim, "I never believed we would reach this stage so quickly. I never dreamt workers would show so much interest in union activity because when I started people believed they would be arrested as we were involved in what they called communism. Anything you did against management was called communism."[76]

Workers struck around a range of issues but their main demand was more narrowly focussed on wages than the demands of 1981. This was partly attributable to the success of the 1981 strikes in rolling back arbitrary dismissals and in curtailing the power of white foremen. It also reflected the fact that with the introduction of the Wiehahn laws Mawu was winning greater recognition in factories and this afforded migrants increased security and human dignity especially through the application of strict grievance and disciplinary procedures which were laid down in agreements. In 1982, workers more specifically focussed on an end to the metal industrial council and the demand for a minimum living wage of R2 an hour. The industrial council had their attention fixed elsewhere. A breakdown of talks between employers and white artisans resulted in a delay in the implementation of the council agreement. As a result black workers' did not receive their annual increase at the usual time. Worker anger increased and at the Mawu AGM, 4 000 workers rejected the industrial council system.[77] Thousands of workers decided they could wait no longer for an increase and they downed tools at companies like Haggie Rand, National Bolts, Screentex, Frys Metals, Defy and Scaw. By September at least 45 strikes had erupted.[78]

Mawu's role in strike wave

The strike wave was a turning point in Mawu's history. It was the breakthrough that the union had been waiting for, and it grew significantly in numerical power and influence through this industrial revolt. It was the scale and the regional character of the revolt that was notable as militant action spread by imitation across the East Rand.

Again, as in the 1980 Volkswagen strike, unplanned militant worker action combined with the efforts of union officials to respond tactically to the exigencies of the moment. The strikes emanated from both formal union structures and informal networks.[79] In a survey of East Rand

employers conducted at the time, one third of factories had a majority Mawu membership; five factories had no members at all; 53 per cent had works councils; 18 per cent had shop-stewards committees; 12 per cent had no representation at all; 5 per cent had `boss-boy' committees, and 12 per cent had works councils and shop-stewards.[80] Clearly, strikes arose in both organised factories where shop-steward committees planned strike action, as well as in unorganised workplaces where workers took spontaneous action and contacted the union thereafter.

Notwithstanding the spontaneous nature of these strikes and the fact that many occurred in unorganised factories, these actions were not unconnected to unionisation efforts that had taken place for some time in the area. Mawu had embarked on its mass mobilisation campaign in efforts to organise the East Rand, and the Katlehong Local dominated by metal shopstewards, was laying the ground for the wave of strikes to come where metal workers would emerge as a significant force. Through high profile disputes such as the Colgate strike which involved the calling of a consumer boycott, the Rely Precision worker play which was performed across the East Rand, and news of the Volkswagen R2 strike demand, workers became conscious of trade unions, what they stood for, and of the strike weapon.

The scale of the strikes however, took both unionists and employers by surprise. Of the 1981 strike wave, Fanaroff commented, “Management didn’t know how to handle the unions and they usually gave in.”[81] Few workers were fired and companies, in their anxiety to resume production, generally quickly took workers back. In effect, as Bonner commented “workers provisionally won a de facto right to strike”[82] since police intervention and arrests were few, prosecutions for illegal strikes minimal, and strike dismissals uncommon. Fantasia has commented that, “the right to strike has always and everywhere been won by striking.”[83] Numerous employers were shocked into listening to workers’ grievances, and in many instances negotiations followed and grievance procedures were put in place. The impromptu nature of the actions, worker militancy, and the scale and frequency of strikes (at one point in early 1982, over ten metal factories downed tools simultaneously and striking workers defiantly marched through the streets of Benoni to Mawu’s offices) meant that workers ran ahead of the union. This tension Mayekiso acknowledged retrospectively when he commented, “When all these strikes started taking place the union was caught unawares and we couldn't cope. The workers were taking the lead and the union was lagging behind.”[84] It was in this respect that the shopsteward councils, in particular the Katlehong local, played a critical role. As recorded in the previous chapter , the Council had originally been pioneered by the union to assist with recruitment, education, and the building of factory structures. Its role now changed as it responded to the wave of strikes. It became in the true sense of the word an organ of workers’ power where lively discussion gave workers the courage to plan and take action. As Baskin records,

> A crowd of about 500 workers make up the audience at the DH Williams Hall in Katlehong... The mood is positive and militant. The chairman opens the meeting with a brief speech: `The struggle has come a long way. But we should remember that we are not fighting only for a 20c wage increase, but for our rights and for our country.` Workers in the audience shout their approval. Then the organiser's report begins. Mayekiso of Mawu reports that Mawu membership in the area is 10 000. Factory after factory gets reported. The details of the various strikes are given. The problems of strikes are the main concern. The speeches are all different. Most are militant, some are cautious. But overall the massage is very much the same. The strike is our only weapon. We are fighting for our rights and we need strong organisation. [85]

A large part of the shopstewards council's power lay in its flexibility and ability immediately to respond to workers' needs and crises. The councils fell outside of formal constitutional structures and so were not subordinate or accountable to any union or federation formations. As autonomous structures they were unfettered by the slower form of union accountability where factory representatives were accountable to the BEC, which was in turn accountable to the NEC. This allowed councils to react swiftly and to participate in what Ruiters describes as "an action-oriented, task-based approach."[86] In addition, their power lay in the fact that many grievances were common to all factories who attended meetings. This allowed for the formulation of common strategies and for the building of a strong sense of unity which made solidarity action possible.

As more strikes broke out, the Katlehong Shopstewards Council's organising role took on a new form - solidarity action for striking workers and other big factory struggles. As an organiser stated, "The council is not to solve individual factory problems like a dismissal... At the council we discuss disputes like strikes. ... how can we help those workers."[87] At times the council focussed on a struggle which it felt was important to win because of the company's strategic or symbolic importance in the area. Mawu's factory Litemaster, where workers went on strike and 22 were dismissed, was one such dispute. Litemaster was a union stronghold and the Council believed a defeat would be a setback for all workers in the area. The Council discussed, adopted and acted upon a range of responses to the Litemaster dismissals. Council shopstewards from a variety of factories decided to support the dismissed workers financially - R 2 000 was collected from Germiston workers for the three months they were out. In the factory, fellow workers engaged in an overtime ban to demand their reinstatement whilst workers from other factories put pressure on their own managements to contact Litemaster about the 22 dismissed. In addition, the Council made the decision to take management to court for an unfair labour practice. Finally they made it known, after an emergency shopsteward council meeting, that if none of these initiatives succeeded, workers would stage an half hour to an hour stoppage in all organised factories. In the end this short general strike was not necessary as management conceded and re-employed the workers.[88] Through this dispute, Litemaster management came to understand the utility of a strong union in their factory where worker representatives, who were skilled negotiators, could accurately represent worker grievances and enable a speedy resolution of problems. Richard Ntuli

was one of these leaders they came to respect. He was the head shopsteward and chair of the Katlehong local and became, in effect, a full-time shopsteward during the strike wave. Management permitted him to take on the role of a roving negotiator as he describes, "Then Litemaster started to trust me and any problem they had they would call me to sort it out. There was a strike at MacSteel and I asked management if I could go and sort it out. They said OK - we were facing many strikes with few people so shopstewards had to help out. They would ask me if I had solved the problem when I came back and I'd say `Yes'. So I started going to all the strikes in Wadeville and helping how to deal with it."[89]

Only a few wage strikes were successful but workers at TMF and McKechnie Brothers won an increase largely because of the support that the shopstewards council gave them. During the strike wave the chair of the council called special emergency meetings from time to time. Here an organiser describes this initiative, "There were discussions about how to keep people solid, united, and stewards visiting those factories on strike ... encouraging them, explaining to them how to keep themselves united and how to push management. I think that's why we won factories like Mc Kechnie and TMF."[90] When the union won a victory in one factory, as at Litematser, Mc Kechnie and TMF, workers then set out to organise plants nearby. Soon committees were formed to organise one street in the factory zone at a time and organising work moved into the shebeens and onto the trains.[91] As more and more workers came out on strike, managements began to employ a new policy of dismissing all strikers, recruiting scabs and then re-employing selectively which thereby enabled them to weed out union activists. At National Spring (NS) management dismissed a worker. In response, the entire workforce of 380 workers downed tools resulting in their instant dismissal. The shopsteward council decided to adopt the issue and pursued a three-pronged strategy of firstly preventing township workers from scabbing by utilising their extensive community contacts; secondly by asking shopstewards in other companies to approach their managements to put pressure on NS to rehire the entire workforce and not selectively; and thirdly, to utilise worker solidarity across unions by asking Naawu to request its members to refuse to handle NS products. The Council's anti-scabbing tactic was so successful that the company was forced to recruit non-unionised coloured workers which broke the strike forcing workers to return without the original dismissed worker.[92] In response the Council started an intensive education and recruitment campaign of coloured workers. Here *Fosatu Worker News* describes the response of a group of unsuspecting strikebreakers who clearly knew of the consequences of scabbing,

> Workers have vowed to fight this tactic of employing coloured scabs which is aimed at creating divisions amongst workers and weakening organisation. Mawu and Fosatu have become so strong in the Wadeville area that management has found it very difficult to recruit scab labour to break strikes. At Metal and Chemical Industries they tried to recruit scab labour from the pass office on the morning of the strike. Workers were not told they were being brought in to break a strike. When the truckload of new recruits arrived and saw the striking workers outside the factory, they all jumped out and ran away. The company then began negotiating.[93]

It was through the shopsteward councils that a core of worker activists emerged at the time who, in essence, became Mawu organisers. Leaders such as Basner Moloi who was chair of the Katlehong local 1981 - 1982 and Fosatu regional education chairperson; metal shopstewards Johnston Nonjeke, Wiseman Zondani, Richard Ntuli, David Sebabi, and Andrew Zulu; and CWIU's Ronald Mofokeng, worked closely with Mawu's only organiser, Moses Mayekiso.[94] They were aware of the illegal nature of the strikes and other associated problems such as the illegality of picketing and of strike pay funds, as well as the frequent use of the Internal Security and Riotous Assembly Acts which permitted the South African Police swiftly to arrest strikers and union officials. They thus encouraged short stoppages (on average about two and half days) which had the main purpose of alerting management to grievances, and actively discouraged longer strikes such as at Volkswagen because workers had fewer skills and less bargaining power. They discussed different forms of strike action with workers such as the short demonstration stoppage, of an hour or so, when workers wanted to draw immediate attention to a factory floor grievance. Most successful strikes were short. Of the longer strikes at Scaw Metals, Dorbyl, and TMSA only Scaw won its demands.[95] In addition these union activists assisted workers to conduct strikes in a disciplined and united way, and to return to work immediately the company agreed to negotiate. Guided by these activists, workers quickly developed a tactical sense and avoided as far as possible the dismissals that took place during the Rely Precision Castings strike in early 1980. Here Ntuli talks about how he guided workers in his own factory to think tactically,

> After the third meeting there was a deadlock and workers decided to go on strike. I tried to stop them but it was their democratic right. As a shopsteward I was there to guide them not to stop them. We just had to make sure they didn't dismiss workers.
> Then Wednesday the workers just came out. Then at the end of the day I said: `Let's go back to work`, so we knock off when we are on duty rather than leaving when we are on strike. This was about at 3 o'clock. My role was to advise as a shopsteward and guide. We would discuss all tactics and things at the BEC that sat once a month and I learnt a lot and I could catch quickly. So they went back.
>
> The following day we went back to the table and came and report and workers decided not to go back to work again in the morning. Then we decided to go on full strike and they told us we were dismissed and he went off to prepare money. Then I said: `Hey guys let's go back to work again` so we were back at the machines when he came back with the money. He said: `What's going on?`. I said: `They're back at work.` [96]

A Phyrric victory?

On the face of it Mawu looked at the height of its power. Every three months the Katlehong local held a general meeting for all Fosatu members in the area. During the strike wave the council swelled as general meetings attracted crowds of 1 000 - 2 000 workers.[97] By the end of 1981 the Fosatu unions had created a worker movement which dominated the area. In August, Mawu's AGM told workers that their Transvaal membership had risen from 6 000 to 10 000 in a year - 2 000 workers attended the AGM in contrast to the 100 who had been present at the AGM the year

before.[98] Nothing appeared able to stop its inexorable growth and surging power. In reality though, 1982 marked a severe crisis for Mawu as the realisation dawned that neither the union, nor the shopstewards councils, were able to manage this new wave of strikes and turn them to the union's or workers' advantage. According to Fanaroff, "Until April [1982], we won every strike. Then we started losing. The recession wasn't the main reason; employers were no longer confused."[99] In 1982 most plants won nothing, many workers were fired, some were rehired, but in the main selectively, whilst many union activists and shopstewards lost their jobs. Fanaroff spoke of "the law of the third strike": "The first time workers struck, the employer gave in; the second time he gave them the benefit of the doubt; by the third he had decided to smash them and knew how to do it."[100] Mawu now had mass membership without the organisational structures to support it which allowed employers to clamp down further. A report at the Mawu May AGM complained that stewards were left to face management "without planning or experience."[101]

The symbol of this employer backlash was a defeat at Scaw Metals in Germiston on the East Rand. In 1981 and 1982 the union targeted Scaw because it was the largest metal factory on the East Rand and was also the stronghold of, Seifsa, where Scaw chairman Graham Boustred, was the force behind Seifsa's policy of wage bargaining at industry level alone. In 1981 when half the factory was organised, and Mawu was struggling to get recognition, the company was struck by a totally unexpected stoppage. A white artisan moulder referred to a black shopsteward as `kaffir` and the worker in fury at this racial slur assaulted him. The shopsteward was dismissed, the white worker was given a final written warning. Mawu shopstewards approached management and demanded an equivalency of punishment. They were told by Scaw employers that `we will never take this man back`. The company was startled when within fifteen minutes, 2 800 workers downed tools to demand reinstatement and recognition of their 82 member workers' committee. The company was forced to reinstate the shopsteward on an equivalent penalty. This was the point of de facto recognition of the union. Scaw never signed a recognition agreement with Mawu as such as discussions always foundered on the plant bargaining clause. Now informal recognition was achieved. Various disciplinary codes were drafted thereafter and `ethnically abusive language' was listed as a dismissible offence.[102] Thereafter, during 1981, Scaw workers embarked on a number of short demonstration stoppages, winning most of their demands. [103]

In April 1982 Scaw workers again struck to challenge Seifsa's bargaining stand by strategically demanding a 10c an hour increase (instead of the union's usual R2 an hour demand). As Mayekiso explained, "There was going to be these industrial council negotiations. They [the workers]...said - `Why should we be represented by people who are not taking a mandate from the workers. Now we are the force, but the employers can't talk to us. Let us take this issue straight onto the shopfloor` - Then they started fighting"[104] But Scaw refused leading *Fosatu Worker News* to

exclaim, “Shopstewards and union representatives were amazed that a management with a liberal image like Anglo American could refuse a 10 cents an hour increase while they had already offered more than that on the Council.”[105] Scaw had seen through the workers’ strategy, and saw this as an opportunity to enforce its bargaining policies. As a management statement made clear, “In the interests of long term stability, sound labour relations and an effective bargaining structure, it is vital that workers realise that stoppages during negotiations will not win concessions.”[106] Centralised bargaining for Boustred, according to Scaw’s Human resources Director, Allan Murray, `was an ideology, a religion.` It was necessary for the company to set a national minimum wage at Industrial Council level which would not be undermined by further plant bargaining in order to ensure small competitors, `the rats and mice of the industry’, would not undercut Scaw by paying higher wages.[107] If they paid lower wages there was the possibility of them manufacturing the product more cheaply, whilst if they paid higher wages they set a standard for the market place. An Industrial Council was the means by which to regulate such dangers from competitors.[108] Thus Mayekiso arrived at the factory gates to a gathering of police and 3 000 dismissed workers [109] in what Bobbie Godsell, an industrial relations consultant at Anglo American, called `a symbolic sacking`.[110] It was a formidable defeat for Mawu’s plant bargaining strategy although Murray asserts that there was no attempt `to break` the union, “it was more to get the power balance right after the union’s victory in 1981. Scaw were not union bashers.”[111]

Swilling’s analysis of the union’s role in this defeat in his 1984 article on the split in Mawu, over-simplistically attributes it to a breakdown in the union’s organisational structures. He asserts,

> Mawu and the SSC [shopstewards council] in particular failed to back up the Scaw workers because of an overall weakness in Mawu’s organisational structures.... the SSC was actually trying to restrain the Scaw workers from going on strike at the point they believed that the necessary organisational preparations were absent. In February and March a large number of strikes had been lost when workers decide unilaterally, without consulting SSC or the union, to go on strike. Mawu had been unable to keep up with the pace the strike waves set. Its amorphous organisational structures were incapable of providing a framework for a strategy which could have taken advantage of the historic opportunity to smash the NIC [National Industrial Council] that the Scaw strike afforded.[112]

The union was indeed surprised and overwhelmed by the scale of the strikes, and it was for this reason that Baskin says “the unions generally played a cautious and disciplining role”[113] as they feared that inexperienced workers in unorganised factories would find themselves without victories and without jobs. Swilling himself acknowledges the union’s lack of capacity, noting that “... the union organisers and leading shop stewards were totally overwhelmed and unable to find ways of ensuring that the mass of new members were trained and effectively incorporated into the structures of the union.....”[114] Yet simultaneously he chides the union for failing “to back up the Scaw workers” whilst acknowledging that the union was trying to address its organisational weaknesses. Mawu, Swilling argues, was forced into a tactical retreat because “effective

opposition to the NIC had been broken"[115] as the "... symbolic sacking was a major defeat for the Scaw workers and the organised working class struggle against the NIC."[116] Yet Mawu's interpretation, and hence its response, to this tactical retreat appears to differ from Swilling's. Swilling blames Mawu's "amorphous organisational structures" in conjunction "with the deepening recession during 1982, the retrenchment of a large number of active shopstewards and overall demoralisation as the heady atmosphere of direct action disappeared."[117] for capital's victory. Yet in hindsight it is evident that far from the recessionary atmosphere demoralising workers, the union actually grew in numbers, strength and power over the next few years of recession. Swilling is obviously correct in attributing some of the responsibility to the union's weak organisational structures in the area, but then fails to recognise its obvious corollary - the relative power of capital in relation to the union's strength at this point. Mawu did not have the capacity or organised power to take on the largest employer in the country, Anglo American, which was at this point focussed on forcing unions to accept bargaining at industry level through the Industrial Council. The union and the Katlehong local had no choice but to restrain workers and thereafter to embark on an intensive discussion of alternative strategies. It was in this context that the union "was forced into a tactical retreat". It was as Swilling depicts a serious defeat for Mawu but the organisational weakness that produced it makes it non-sensical to claim that the union had failed to take advantage of "the historic opportunity to smash the NIC". The best the union could do in these circumstances was to recognise its failure and to view the defeat as an opportunity to develop new strategies rather than slug it out with the heavyweights in the industry. This Mawu's experience and analytical resources allowed it to do. Mawu had, for example, faced annihilation in 1976 but a changed strategy had enabled it to both survive and grow. Its independence allowed it to adopt policies that were often rejected by more overtly political trade unions or political formations. For Mawu's leadership harnessing worker militancy in the aftermath of the strike wave was as important as the strike revolt itself. Its ultimate decision, in February 1983, to join the Industrial Council that workers had so vociferously rejected as unrepresentative, was typical of its dialectical approach to finding solutions (see following chapter). Ultimately this industrial council structure which Swilling lamented Mawu's lost opportunity `to smash' was to be a source of considerable power for the union.

In addition, Swilling argues that Mawu's organisational weaknesses allowed for an organisational split[118] because power began "to shift towards a leading stratum of personnel within Mawu"[119] which involved a decline in worker participation, worker control, and a distinct danger of a drift into unrepresentative union bureaucracy. In his concern to explain the split in Mawu, he fails to see the importance of these strikes in strengthening the union as he focuses almost exclusively on the weaknesses in Mawu's organisational structure. Firstly, the strike wave had popularised the concept of a trade union and it role in fighting for workers rights; and secondly it had established

Mawu as the union of workers choice across the largest concentration of metal workers in the country. Workers were now organising themselves and coming to the union office, "We don't have to go to the factories to recruit these days." commented one organiser.[120] Finally, although Swilling's article acknowledges the emergence of a powerful worker leadership, he draws a negative conclusion from this fact. As previously noted there were leadership figures who were crucial in co-ordinating these strikes. The strikes were spontaneous, and careful factory organisation suffered, but these strikes nonetheless benefited from union guidance. The experience that thousands of workers gained over this period, whether in victory or defeat, as discussion and debate erupted across the East Rand, gave them valuable exposure in the wielding of power. Many lessons were learnt, and layers of leadership emerged at a number of different levels in the union and the community and not only as Swilling believes solely at the level of advanced shopstewards "who were directly involved in the running of the SSC, or playing leading roles in the unions and/or the Federation and benefiting from education programmes..."[121]

Moreover, the militant strike revolt was as Ruiters put it "profoundly political."[122] The shopsteward councils allowed ordinary workers openly to talk about politics for the first time since the early 1960s. For many workers the struggle in the factories was integral to the struggle for broader liberation and this gave worker action an additional power. Furthermore, the shopstewards councils provided "a focus for workers around issues beyond the factory in that area"[123] as workers appealed to township residents for support and mobilised workers in trains, hostels, shebeens and churches as a broader political movement began to take shape. This political awakening was not initially articulated as support for any particular party or political formation but rather as the chair of the Katlehong local put it "we are not fighting only for a 20c wage increase, but for our rights and for our country."[124] Nonetheless this heightened political consciousness arose in a specific political context. Before 1979 the black consciousness movement and its ideology had predominated, but by 1979 the non-racial ideology of the ANC had begun to reassert itself particularly through the launch of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas). By early 1980, through the efforts of leading student activists, Cosas had developed a strong presence in East Rand townships. Its militant stance on inferior Bantu education was not lost on workers many of whom were products of the 1976 generation of students themselves.[125] For migrant workers however, it was not political allegiance to the re-emergence of the non-racial ANC that constituted their primary awakening. It was rather a political consciousness which was born of experiencing a real surge of power during the strike wave. As a worker expressed it, "Other workers see that these workers have got for themselves power over management during the strike. They see and they tell themselves that it is this kind of power that can help us to get our rights. This was a challenge to them to do the same, to go on strike to get their own power."[126]

Conclusion

The three studies outlined above, namely the Volkswagen 1980 dispute, the pension strikes, and the 1981-1982 East Rand strike wave, are seemingly vastly different in character. Nevertheless they all took place in the context of a growing union movement and a willingness by workers to take action against low wages, job insecurity, and harsh working conditions. They were all products of spontaneous worker action which in their militancy, discipline, or scale, took the union leadership and employers by surprise. In all cases however the leadership was able to bring to these spontaneous actions a strategic vision and an ability to translate worker grievances into sustainable demands through appropriate organisational strategies and research. Finally, these disputes all in some manner ruptured established apartheid practices in significant ways.

In all of these disputes an additional locus of power was present which was the growing political consciousness that workers began to articulate. This power was experienced as a continuum with oppression in the workplace. It was also present in the experience itself of challenging employers. Moreover the scale of the strikes often resulted in the spillage of workers' grievances beyond the factory into local communities. In addition, the pension strikes brought the new labour movement successfully into tripartite negotiations with capital and the state for the first time.

The industrial disputes explored thus far, demonstrate that a source of these unions' power was the combination of spontaneous, militant worker action, coupled with a variety of planned and unplanned union responses to this action. In all cases the union leadership was required to extemporise in the heat of worker action and to refocus and deepen dissatisfactions in order to strike at the heart of their membership's exploitation. Moreover, their power lay in the pursuance of these objectives once the immediate pressures had passed. This enabled an extension of workers' rights and a systematic improvement in their working conditions.

3. Expansion and industrial action: 1980 -1984

Introduction

In the early 1980s both Mawu and Naawu spread to all parts of the country. The unions typically established a presence in a new area by focussing organisation on large and/or influential factories where news of intensive struggles spread to neighbouring factories and communities. These factories were sometimes consciously targeted by the union, or in other cases became the focus of union attention after an approach for assistance from workers. Once a successful industrial action had been waged, a cadre of new union leaders would emerge who would recruit workers in other workplaces in the area. In this manner both of these unions pioneered expansion into new areas for

each other and for other Fosatu unions.

Frequently, after these unions had targeted a factory in a new area for organisation, a dispute would erupt. This industrial action would succeed in alerting other workers in the area to issues of unionisation and would raise the profile of these unions. By 1984 both unions had expanded sufficiently to become genuine national industrial unions and to assume the status of the most significant black unions in their sectors. They had also succeeded in raising the political consciousness of workers through the empowerment that they experienced in the workplace, and through their experience of the solidarity lent them by other factories in their industrial areas as well as from residents in the communities from which they came.

This section explores firstly Naawu's extension into the Transvaal in the auto assembly sector. Secondly, it investigates Mawu's expansion into rural industrial areas such as Richard's Bay, and into deconcentrated areas like Brits, and finally into the homelands. It will become evident as these investigations proceed that the unions are once again making significant inroads into the fabric of apartheid.

Section 1: Expansion in auto assembly

Introduction

Before the 1980s the auto industry was located primarily in the Eastern Cape and was dominated by large assembly plants. This sector of the industry was the first to be organised by the union and continued to dominate the sector. In 1985, for example, auto assembly membership constituted 71 per cent of paid up membership in Naawu consisting of 14, 182 workers.[127] Revolving around, and largely dependent on the Auto Assembly sector, were the considerably smaller Tyre and Rubber and Auto Component sub-sectors. Whilst Tyre and Rubber logically fell into Auto Components it was, for various reasons, more strongly linked to the Auto Assembly sector.

The auto sector as a whole was substantially smaller than other sectors in Numsa, in particular the engineering sector, as membership figures at the time of merger into Numsa demonstrate; engineering constituted 70 000 members, motor 40 000, and auto 24 000 members. Yet the sector occupied a strategic position in the South African economy and a crucial place in the regional economy of the Eastern Cape (and to a lesser extent the Western Cape) which enabled these workers to wield considerable power in the metal sector as a whole.

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis charted the growth of unionisation in the auto industry in the Eastern Cape through the establishment of UAW/Numarwosa, and later Naawu, in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. This chapter has explored how Volkswagen workers in Naawu conducted a

groundbreaking strike in 1980, the nature of whose demands, and the manner of whose struggle, was to resonate down the decade. The section below continues the exploration of how Naawu built power in the industry through the extension of its base in the Eastern and Western Cape, and examines various bargaining strategies that it employed to achieve maximum power in different sub-sectors of the industry and in differing geographic areas and circumstances around the country.

Expansion into the Transvaal

In the early 1980s, UAW/Numarwosa through force of circumstances began to expand their base to other major centres in the country, in particular to the Northern Transvaal. In the late seventies and early eighties a geographical shift began to take place in the location of auto companies as a number of key factories moved from the Eastern Cape and Western Cape to the Transvaal. This was partly prompted by a cost cutting exercise which involved a change in transportation patterns. Previously technology and component parts from Britain, Japan, USA, and Germany were shipped into South Africa necessitating the location of plants adjacent to a good working harbour. Port Elizabeth was an ideal location. As a number of auto manufacturers moved over to the new `just-in-time` method of production[128], pioneered by the Japanese, which eliminated the use of large warehouses to store excess supplies, component parts were flown in direct to assembly plants when required. This obviated the necessity to site factories adjacent to a port and by permitting the location of factories in the industrial heartland of the Transvaal dramatically cut the cost of storage and transportation of vehicles from the Eastern Cape to major markets in the Transvaal. As auto companies such as Toyota, Sigma, BMW, and Datsun moved, or established new factories in the Transvaal, so the Eastern Cape component manufacturers followed to ensure a more rapid supply to these large assembly plants.[129]

In addition, the move to the Transvaal was prompted for some Eastern Cape employers, by the growing volatility of labour relations in the region and the sharp rise in wages.[130] The northern Transvaal by comparison was a haven of peace in the shape of plentiful unorganised workers to whom existent auto companies were paying considerably less in wages than their counterparts in Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth and East London. It is this mobility of capital that Crouch sees as going to "the heart of the weakness of the union's position in confrontation with the employer...the great weakness of labour in its relations with capital which no amount of organisation can offset. Capital unlike labour can change its form, go away, move to sectors or countries where it can be more profitably employed whilst labour comprises individual human beings who need constant subsistence and can only move to alternative employment and across geographical distances in search of employment with great risk and difficulty."[131] Even labour's most powerful weapon, the strike, he contends, cannot withstand capital's resources and mobility. Naawu was however fortunate in that capital relocated within the same country and undaunted, it embarked on a

concerted effort to organise auto plants in the Transvaal. This was not only a strategy to challenge the exploitative wages in the area, but as Naawu's Les Kettledas recalls, it was also a tactic to raise conditions of employment to similar levels and thereby reduce the incentive for Eastern Cape employers to relocate,

> We said, listen, you can run wherever you want to, we'll be there. And that's how we started organizing in the Transvaal so that we could balance everything, raise conditions of employment to about the same level, so that there was no incentive for Eastern Cape people to run to the Transvaal.... Then we started organizing and we gained in strength in the other factories, with Toyota [in Transvaal], with AAD in Cape Town, which was then Leyland, and with the companies up here [Transvaal]. We then consciously started bringing the shop stewards together off the car factories into a national auto shopstewards council.[132]

Initially in 1979 the union sent Kettledas to organise in the Transvaal and gave him the brief to unionise Sigma. Numarwosa had an UAW organiser who was recruiting at Sigma but by the time Kettledas arrived she had only recruited 75 members.[133] The Transvaal posed new challenges for Numarwosa/UAW because conditions for unionism were less favourable than in the Eastern Province. Firstly, coloured and white workers in the Eastern Cape fell within the ambit of the Industrial Conciliation Act, unlike Africans who formed the majority of potential membership in the Transvaal and who were excluded from its provisions. Secondly, the Transvaal unlike the Eastern Cape which negotiated through the Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry, was not covered by any industrial council. In consequence, the union could not utilise any of the benefits that accrued to workers through a centralised bargaining system. The union was obliged to fight for recognition and bargaining rights in each company without the possibility of extending improved conditions to unorganised workers in other companies. Kettledas was confronted with a region where the auto sector had not been systematically exposed to unionisation in the way that the Eastern Province had been since the 1960s. African workers in the auto sector were almost (although not entirely) unorganised and no experienced organised Coloured workers existed to assist in the process of unionising their African counterparts.

Nevertheless, African workers were ripe for organisation, and six months after arriving in the Transvaal, Kettledas recruited substantial membership in Bosal at Kuduspoort, BMW at Rosslyn, and at Datsun Pretoria.[134] These factories provided the basis for the establishment of a new Naawu branch. It soon became clear that the union in the Transvaal required dedicated local organisers and not just the temporary attention of the Eastern Cape's Branch Secretary. As a result Taffy Adler was employed in 1981 to set up office in Pretoria and to be "responsible for the Transvaal region"[135] He brought with him a Benoni Fosatu organiser Martin Ndaba. Between them they embarked on the task of organising a small number of assembly plants "...which are massive, you walk for 30 minutes from one side to the other. The smallest was 600 workers in Brits, and the largest was Volkswagen with 6000 workers." recalls Adler.[136] This challenge was combined with

the organisation of numerous small labour intensive component factories where workers endured `terrible conditions`.[137]

In a similar manner to Mawu, where the organisation of a key factory opened up a new area to unionisation in the East Rand, a major strike at Sigma Motor Corporation in April 1981 launched Naawu in the northern Transvaal. The strike took place in the context of a rash of smaller strikes that had broken out in the Pretoria area where workers expressed their dissatisfaction at discrepancies in wage levels between themselves and auto workers in the Eastern Cape. Influenced by the R2 living wage campaign in the Eastern Cape, 4 500 workers spontaneously struck to demand a R2 an hour increase to raise the minimum wage from R1,04 to R3 an hour, and to demand recognition of Numarwosa and the suspension of the Liaison Committee. Management refused to negotiate and claimed that the union had agreed to participate in the Liaison Committee in exchange for union access rights and stop order facilities until such time as it proved majority support. "...Wage negotiations will only restart when employees are back at work, and normal production resumes." it stated.[138] This was a baptism of fire for the new union branch. A strike of this scale in a huge auto company was unheard of in the region at the time, Adler recalls the impact it made on him, "...my first exposure to a massive strike of 4 000 workers... It was the first time I'd come across a corporate organisation - huge. We negotiated with 9-10 people on the other side, and they'd present documents and research, and quote us from things overseas - Anglo American, very sophisticated."[139] Numarwosa in the meantime submitted signed stop order forms to claim majority support to which the company responded by issuing an ultimatum to workers to return or be dismissed. At a mass meeting workers rejected the ultimatum, stating, "We will not touch a tool until they decide to consider our demands."[140] This challenge was met by the company dismissing the entire work force, whilst it claimed that they had "terminated their services by their own actions"[141]and informed them that they could individually reapply for their jobs.

The situation became exceedingly tense as the company began to recruit replacement workers in local townships where the union was conducting mass meetings. Adler recalls the importance of an apparently simple, but vital facility, upon which a strike such as this could succeed or fail, "There was a Mamelodi [African township adjacent to Pretoria] community hall. Without access to that hall it would have been a major problem. And that's maybe why we didn't succeed in the north in BMW and Nissan because we once got a church hall in Soshanguve, and the Bop [Bophuthatswana] police came and broke up the meeting and I got arrested. There wasn't an easily accessible hall for us to organise from."[142] After one mass meeting, fired up workers en route to the township, rocked and stoned passing vehicles and a worker, Paulus Mahlangu, was shot dead by a panicking women motorist who fired gun shots into a group of strikers. The union condemned Sigma for "helping to create a situation in which this tragic incident could occur."[143]

The union took the workers' case to their local communities and waged a pamphlet campaign in Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, and Mabopane to generate solidarity for dismissed strikers and to urge people not to scab. It met with little success. Hundreds of workers queued for work and Sigma reported that 1500 workers had been re-employed, and 1500 new workers employed. After ten days the company agreed to negotiate but refused to re-employ all strikers. Several hundred were not re-hired, in particular 18 members of the `Committee of 20' who had been nominated to negotiate with management. Its factory committee was destroyed and the union had to return and rebuild its leadership. These disillusioned worker leaders later announced they were leaving Fosatu as the union had not done enough to get them re-employed. They subsequently joined Macwusa who had organised about 400 workers in the plant. This contributed to an on-going battle for the union to secure a majority in the plant. Adler recalls, "...because of the size of the plant we couldn't get the majority of workers, this minority union membership was to bug us for ages."[144] In addition, only a 40cent per hour wage increase was granted which remained far adrift from Naawu's R2 ph hour living wage demand. The strike however was not without gains. Action on this scale had not been witnessed in the area before. Production at the plant had dropped by 28 per cent whilst sales plunged from 5086 to 3684 units as a result of the strike.[145] The action raised the union's profile and the potential power of unionisation in general amongst workers in the area. Most important workers had won recognition of their union. A worried management, as Adler relates, " ...were so relieved to find a negotiating partner and to settle - because it was their first big strike. And out of this came the consolidation of the union presence in Pretoria, and the setting up of a shopstewards committee and shopstewards facilities. And we got access to these plants..."[146]

"Access to these plants" after the prominent Sigma strike, however, was not an immediate or automatic gain. As previously mentioned, the Eastern Cape auto industrial council did not extend to the Transvaal and Naawu in the Transvaal was forced to fight for access to these often intractable auto company premises, factory by factory. A 1984 dispute at BMW offers a good illustration of the nature of the obstacles the union faced in the Transvaal where employers seemed to have learnt little from earlier recognition battles in the Eastern Cape.

BMW was a German assembly plant situated in an industrial zone, Rosslyn, about 20 kms northwest of Pretoria. It employed about 1 500 workers who were mostly commuters from the adjacent Bophuthatswana homeland. UAW started organising the company in 1978 and had gained 56 per cent membership by 1979.[147] The company however, was determined to install a liaison committee despite a solid union presence and, in similar fashion to Mawu's B&S dispute, conducted a campaign which was based on a need to maintain patronage. It was reluctant to concede basic union rights such as recognition of shopstewards, and officials' access to company

premises, and its obstinacy provoked a seven year battle which ended in the bitter 1984 strike.[148]

Prior to the February 1984 dispute, at least four strikes took place at BMW. In 1980 a dispute was sparked over the company's refusal to negotiate wages,[149] in 1981, another wage strike broke out. In a patronising response the company declared that, "Dr. Von Koeber [Managing Director] says that are you aware that there are hundreds of trade unions in South Africa, and he cannot be expected to deal with all of them."[150] Naawu was in fact the sole union in the company at the time. Underlying these persistent demands to negotiate wages was a deeper grievance, which concerned the company's refusal to consult with a majority union. Workers were voiceless and this resulted in disputes that could have been avoided if the company had met the union in good faith and exchanged information. In the 1981 strike, for example, workers returned to work when they discovered that the company was in fact offering the highest minimum wage in the auto industry. The union believed, however, that BMW, as with other Transvaal employers, was paying higher wages to keep the union out. BMW refuted this saying that workers did not "...see the need for a Union. We believe we have the internal mechanism to handle the labour situation satisfactorily... we are not paying higher wages to keep the union out , we are paying higher wages for the work done. The fact that the union is finding it hard to organise is not our fault."[151]

In 1983, after long negotiations, the company finally agreed to sign a recognition agreement with Naawu. The following year it promptly broke the terms and spirit of this contract by refusing to negotiate wages in good faith. Members adopted Naawu's living wage demand of R3,50 per hour only to be rebuffed with a management offer of a 10c an hour increase which fell short of the demand by R1,10 per hour.[152] Distrust was so intense by this point that the following morning 1 500 union members came out on a wildcat strike. Alarmed, management quickly met with the union and agreed to withdraw its offer and to start fresh negotiations. Workers agreed to return to work, but before the next meeting, the company released a statement announcing that they would only negotiate wages later in the year, and that workers should not allow themselves to suffer as a result of a strike "caused by a few irresponsible people."[153] This was the final insult.

Naawu held a report-back and the plant immediately came to a standstill. The company swiftly closed the factory and began disciplinary hearings against 19 workers, mostly union leaders, whilst negotiations with the union ceased. Meanwhile, the company launched a union-bashing publicity campaign where it utilised newspapers, radio, and TV to put its propaganda message across. It also resorted to dropping leaflets from helicopters on residents in adjacent townships. These declared that, "It was becoming impossible for BMW to regard the union as a reasonable discussion partner in this matter of resuming production... Management would like employees to know that we believe that Naawu does not represent your true feelings on this matter. In future we will

communicate directly with you and we are looking forward to your loyal support."[154] This constituted an outrageous claim considering that Naawu had achieved 75 per cent membership in the plant. The crudeness of the company's tactics and its patronising attitude to black workers is well-illustrated by the following anecdote. In an attempt to break workers' solidarity the firm invited striking workers and their wives to an evening of entertainment through a glossy invitation that was showered from a helicopter. The evening included the viewing of TV programmes showing soccer and music features (few workers had TVs), free cold drinks and "a discussion on the strike at BMW."[155] This met with a negligible response. Naawu negotiators were nevertheless alarmed at the company's apparent determination to break the union. At a key union meeting workers recognised the extent of the threat. "It was one of the few times" remembers Adler that "the stewards made the tactical decision to let the strike go because I felt it was the only way we could get BM [BMW] to change their position and this was correct."[156] This led to a decision by the 1 500 strikers to return to work. BMW insisted they return on a staggered basis, an instruction which was ignored by workers as they entered the plant en masse after a ten day lock-out. Wage bargaining recommenced in August that year and culminated in a signed agreement which allowed for increases ranging between 33c to 50c an hour which brought the minimum to R2,73 per hour.[157] The company had finally conceded that Naawu was the workers' representative of choice.

Mirroring the sophistication of the more experienced Eastern Cape officials and union membership, the newly established Transvaal branch demonstrated considerable tactical understanding and a keen appreciation of how to play the game of power. Adler commented on how the extent of national organisation in Naawu was an important prop in times of such disputes, "There was a level of organisational capacity which was admirable [in Naawu] so in the situation at BMW there were discussions in the union about it. There was a management committee at the provincial and national level where these issues were discussed."[158] The dispute demonstrated a union maturity beyond that of the ostensibly sophisticated German employer. It was this level of sophistication that impressed other workers in the industrial areas of the northern Transvaal and which extended the union's growth and influence deep into the fabric of the auto sector. After 1981 organisation spread rapidly and between 1981 - 1984 six new branches of the union were formed.[159] Owing to the scale of these auto assembly plants Naawu, unlike Mawu, established a branch in each company it organised. Naawu's expansion efforts had assailed the fragmented apartheid state. It had built a national union in auto which prevented auto employers nationwide from exploiting less well protected and experienced labour in other parts of the country. A previously coloured-only union had overcome the ethnic barriers erected by apartheid to contest the exploitation of all labour no matter their background and to thus promote the unity, and thereby the power, of auto workers in all parts of the country.

Section 2: Expansion in metal engineering

Introduction

The East Rand strikes had strained the union's resources almost to its limits. It was not however only on this front that the union was experiencing pressure. Word of Mawu's activities was spreading and the East Rand strikes only served to accelerate the process of growth wherever clusters of metal workers were labouring. At this point a strategic option for Mawu could have been to restrict further expansion and to focus on consolidating structures at the numerous factories that had recently entered the union. This was the strategy that it had adopted in the late 1970s after experiencing the collapse of a number of its factories. Organising conditions however had changed by the early 1980s. Firstly the Wiehahn laws had created a new worker confidence in joining unions. As a consequence, Mawu was discovering that it had less and less control over its recruitment networks. Workers were actively seeking out the union and their heady optimism infected union organisers with the vast opportunities this held for the union. As Fanaroff wryly observed, "We were opportunists, we were going to control the world, control the universe."[160] To turn new recruits away would have been to permanently lose this militant membership. "We had an office in Wadeville by that time", Fanaroff recalls "and Moss used to get people marching across the veld to these offices just outside Katlehong. They'd come and say: `We're on strike what do we do next?` So they'd join up - 300 people at a go - then they'd sign them all over night and go on strike. I remember Haggie had a strike like this.[161] Secondly the labour movement was experiencing an injection of real power for the first time. This was something unionists had dreamed of in the seventies, and the vision of developing powerful national industrial unions began to appear as a real possibility.

Expansion into other areas of the country took different forms but it was seldom a strategised executive decision to open up a new area. A union decision to organise in a particular area was usually a response to an approach by workers to become organised. This was the case for example in the union's decision to organise workers in Brits, Witbank, and other small industrial areas in the Eastern Transvaal as well as in Richards Bay. Although organising tactics differed in different areas there were broad similarities in the union's organising approach to a new area. This typically involved a concentration on the largest, and most influential factory/factories in an area. News of an intensive struggle would spread to adjacent workplaces, townships and hostels. Once they were successfully organised a new cadre of local union leaders would have emerged who in turn took a leading role in recruiting workers from neighbouring factories into various Fosatu unions. When a number of companies in a particular sector had been organised the union would launch a new branch serviced by an organiser and branch office. Metal companies were often the largest employers in new areas owing to the labour intensive nature of the industry and because of their predominance in the manufacturing sector. Thus Naawu and Mawu emerged as pioneers in

opening up new industrial zones to unionisation. Recruitment drives across industries in such areas had the added advantage of allowing for significant degrees of solidarity action in times of dispute. Fosatu members in support industries and in neighbouring factories did not hesitate to take solidarity or blacking action.

In this section pioneering union expansion into the rural industrial areas of Richards Bay and Isithebe in Natal, the Eastern Transvaal power plants and mines, and Brits in the Western Transvaal is explored. It will again become apparent that organising initiatives in these areas were significant in sundering important apartheid constructs. In these cases Mawu attacked the divisive Bantustan system and its associated `deconcentrated` industrial areas whereby the state sought to establish industrial bases which would provide employment for the people of the impoverished homelands. In this manner it hoped to divest itself of the responsibility for these over-populated impoverished areas whilst still ensuring that a plentiful supply of cheap labour existed on the borders of `South Africa`. In the main the union was successful in the erosion of this apartheid construct except in the case of its expansion attempts into the Eastern Transvaal's mines and electricity generating plants.

Its open door recruitment policy was not without its problems. Mawu was desperately under-resourced. The union's initial response was non-interventionist. It allowed the tide of growth and militant struggle to run its course and in permitting this organisational freedom it promoted a high level of creativity, tactical innovation and worker ownership of the struggle. It was however forced to revisit this unrestrained growth and its inability to service its members at a later date and would develop a number of innovative tactics to deal with the problem.

Expansion into Northern Natal

The unions' entry into both Richards Bay and Brits took an organisational form unlike that adopted in the larger urban areas. The cohesiveness of these small communities and their vulnerability owing to the isolation and relative smallness of their industrial zones gave these struggles a distinctive character.

In Northern Natal the unions grew in a less constricted survivalist context than that which had characterised organisation in the large urban areas in the 1970s and early 1980s. In response to an enthusiastic reception to joining unions, and consequent rapid growth, Mawu utilised an innovative organisational combination. It emphasised the centrality of shopstewards and their training whilst following a form of general union structure in which community meetings played a central role, but where the commitment was to winning shopfloor rights. June-Rose Nala (Hartley), a Mawu general secretary and later northern Natal branch secretary, commented on workers' high levels of

independence, self-sufficiency, initiative and control of their union when pioneering organisation in Richard's Bay. The self assertion of these workers produced a felicitous partnership with Nala who was the sole Fosatu organiser in the area which of necessity demanded a different organising approach. Nala, by then an experienced organiser, adopted a strategy focussed on training factory leadership, and on building efficient administrative and bureaucratic systems in the northern Natal branch office. After receiving basic input on union organisation from Nala, workers took control of factory organisation. Their aim was to organise the entire area. As Alusaf's Jeffrey Vilane recalls, "It is not enough within Richards Bay to be just one company. There was Triomf. As soon as they came we started organising them, and then we started also organising others. At that time there was a general union that was taking every worker until they were strong in the factory and then we put them into their union. Our goal was to shift the whole of Richards Bay."[162]

When Nala was sent by Mawu's NEC in 1981 to Richard's Bay she went as a Fosatu emissary. She did not however enter virgin territory. There had been pockets of union activity in Richards Bay since the early 1970s. In 1972 un-unionised Alusaf (a large aluminium smelter) workers staged their first strike in support of a wage demand. At the time they were earning a minimum of 8 cents per hour. They won a 2 cents an hour increase. They subsequently joined Mawu as soon as it was launched in Pietermaritzburg in 1973. The union followed this initiative with a recruitment drive in the factory but failed to win recognition despite the support of fifty per cent of the workforce by 1975. The company steadfastly promoted a liaison committee. In May 1980 workers at a number of Richards Bay factories, including Alusaf, approached Fosatu for organising assistance.[163] This initiative decided Mawu on the launching of a northern Natal Branch in October 1980. This was not an isolated Mawu initiative but was viewed rather as the expansion of Fosatu to the Richards Bay/ Empangeni area where other affiliates had also started organising. In November 1980, 350 workers gathered to launch the new Mawu office and branch.[164] Nala had previously visited the area as part of a Fosatu delegation when she was General Secretary of Mawu. Now, in 1981, she returned as northern Natal Branch Secretary and was confronted with "a lot of willingness and excitement that we'd come."[165] Alusaf was clearly the factory from which to launch its organising efforts.

Alusaf management reacted to the union's recruitment drive by inviting the SA Boilermakers Union, at this point affiliated to Tusca, to recruit the company's African workers. Under management pressure African members of the liaison committee joined the Boilermakers but other workers, according to an Alusaf shopsteward "refused to join the Boilermakers and were keen to join Mawu".[166] By the end of July 1981, 365 workers out of Alusaf's workforce of 1100 had joined Mawu.[167] Shopstewards approached management to demand recognition and under pressure from workers the company agreed to meet union organisers, to grant stop order facilities

and to consult with shopstewards. An Alusaf shopsteward described the dramatic change that overcame workers, "...there was a big change in their attitudes... Every worker is united not fighting each other. They sing freedom songs...they are now used to attending meetings... everyone will sit and listen to the meeting and ask good questions... They're learning their own power. If there's something happening in another department, they used to feel, this is none of my business... But now they know...they must care because in future it's coming to him."[168]

Organisation at Alusaf operated essentially as a launching pad `to shift the whole of Richards Bay.` The intensive factory by factory organisation and consolidation that had characterised early organisation in southern Natal in such areas as New Germany, Pinetown, Mobeni, and Jacobs was abandoned. Vilane refers to Mawu as being `a general union' which although not entirely accurate had, at this point, large elements of truth in the way in which the union conducted itself. Worker leadership at Alusaf developed a recruitment strategy which involved organising large general meetings of workers from different factories residing in the adjacent townships of Esikhaweni and Nseleni. Union recruitment meetings did not take place outside factory gates but were held in the community. This style of recruitment was reminiscent of earlier efforts adopted on the East Rand in 1980 which were influenced by the Eastern Cape community unions' style of organising (discussed in Chapter 3). Alusaf shopstewards would have been aware of this recruitment tactic through support visits from East Rand shopstewards such as Rodney Mwambo, a shopsteward from a Benoni factory, who had joined the Fosatu organising team at Richards Bay during his July annual leave in 1980.[169] It should be noted however that this organising style differed from Saawu's approach in East London in that these large community meetings situated the shopsteward and workers at the heart of their mobilisation. At such gatherings Fosatu, its unions and their structures were introduced. There was general agreement at these meetings that liaison committees where management imposed agreements without consulting workers, were to be replaced by trade union structures.[170] This organising style also differed from Fosatu central, which having taken the decision to organise industrial unions viewed the general union approach with some reservation.[171] In Northern Natal Mawu's role was to organise and recruit wherever workers in any numbers showed an interest regardless of whether they were metal workers or not. Except for the initial phase of organisation, there was no strategic targeting of factories. Rather the slogan `the organised must organise the unorganised`[172] became the guiding principle. This was in contrast to the organising strategy on the East Rand at the time or in the industrial areas around Durban where targeting large factories, followed by the training of shopstewards to service smaller metal establishments, was the prescribed survival strategy. There was no possibility on the East Rand, for example, of Mawu organising all the small metal establishments in the area. In Richards Bay/Empangeni large factories were initially targeted to act as launching pads for the union and thereafter the stated intention was to organise *all* factories which the circumscribed nature of

industrial development made a possibility. Rapid growth nationally and a more permissive general context, which the East Rand strikes demonstrated, permitted Nala to plot her own course without Fosatu's intervention. Ultimately the Fosatu leadership were forced to recognise that Nala's approach had successfully combined the strengths of both industrial and general unionism.

Workers were rapidly recruited across industrial sectors. Only metalworkers were signed into Mawu whilst workers from other industrial sectors were recruited into one of the Fosatu affiliates. Workers from the chemical factory Triomf, from the Huletts Sugar Mill, from Richards Bay Coal Terminal, and from Sappi's Paper Mill were signed up and directed across to the appropriate Fosatu affiliate - CWIU, SFAWU, TGWU, and PPWAWU respectively. When sufficient numbers had been recruited in a particular sector, Mawu would contact the general secretary of the union and recommend that an organiser be deployed. Most Fosatu unions resisted and delayed establishing themselves in the area, partly Nala believes because remote rural areas were not given much significance in the unions at the time, and maybe because the community and Nala were doing such an effective job.[173] In Mawu too Nala experienced a lack of support. Reservations around the general union style of organising may have been at play but Nala believes a complex relationship between her and male white intellectuals in the union prior to her departure to Richard's Bay also played a role. Here she speaks of some of these complexities,

> I was lucky to move up to Richard's Bay getting independent space. There was always a thing about white officials who knew everything...If you think you are developing a person you think you can hold the person there... but people naturally take off and want their own space...
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> A lot of issues were not big political differences. They were really about union control...if you talk about democracy let's have democracy...When I saw the way people were manipulated I used to get really kind of sick...The whole inferiority thing, the complex between black and white is critical... underlying it is inferiority, there's something superior about Geoff and Bernie because they're white, maybe they were intellectuals, maybe we were relying on them for information and so on...There was tension, especially towards the end with me because I was constantly thinking why is it like this? When are we going to learn that we are equals?...At the same time they (white intellectuals)... had a place in the organisation. They had talents, they had abilities which we don't have.
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> ...anyway being in Richard's Bay was good. They didn't respect the branch very much when the Alusaf strike happened. I came down for an executive meeting here (Durban). The same as the Alusaf management, these guys were quite happy that Richards Bay was finished. It was quite bizarre. I think that really hit me in the gut...I was just a source of annoyance to them. But when the strike happened... the branch was quite independent and strong, doing its own thing even if starved of resources, it survived...I suppose it's just a level of those politics there.[174]

Despite these tensions the union, including white intellectual leadership, permitted Nala the space to creatively organise in northern Natal without suspending her activities or terminating the establishment of a branch in the region. Nala ultimately emerged as an autonomous worker intellectual who stood in creative tension with the white intellectuals in Mawu and Fosatu.

The strength of the union in this area was that once recruited, effective servicing of membership was sustained. Nala continued to focus on shopstewards training and branch office administration whilst shopstewards maintained a vibrant organisation on the ground. Nala comments that membership and their shopstewards `owned the union. `[175] She contrasted this state of affairs with the style of organisation in southern Natal where factories were scattered and employed workers from a wide range of communities. There she believes 'we were creating a dependence'. In southern Natal, Nala recalls, that union officials drove workers to and from their homes in combis at all times of day and night and convened venues and meetings for workers to attend. In northern Natal shopstewards did all this themselves. They arranged meetings (often between 6pm - 4am), venues, and hired combis and transported people to the various meetings and their homes. The union had minimal financial resources and despite being an impoverished community members found the means. "Workers at Alusaf were fantastic, they used to whip around, everyone donates. They gave freely and continually... It was very important to them knowing it was their organisation, it succeeded." Nala was only summoned to a factory if workers were in need of advice. " `Don't come this week,' they would say `we're cleaning up the kaffir business` and they would have stoppages on the shopfloor demanding people get disciplined or kicked right out. I would have nothing to do with it. These guys would just get thrown out. Richards Bay was full of raw, I don't know where they came from, fascistic types, right wingers and racists. White workers in Richards Bay were part of commandos [military units]. It's a little island up there you can do what you like." Nala herself as a black organiser, although unaware of its extent at the time, was viewed by white staff at Alusaf with extreme racism. She was told years later that an Alusaf secretary had smashed and thrown away the company's cups because `kaffirs drank out of them`.

By mid 1982 there was widespread knowledge of trade unions in the area. It was the intersection of this with a prolonged and bitter pension/wage strike at Alusaf[176] in July 1982 however that had the decisive effect of 'shifting the whole of Richards Bay'. In the wake of the 1981 nationwide pension strikes, Alusaf workers demanded to withdraw from the Metal Industries Group Pension Fund (MIGPF) from which workers could only access their monies at 65 years of age by which time most were deceased and their families were infrequently able to access the money thereafter. Their objective was the creation of a new fund governed by worker-negotiated rules. The company delayed taking up the issue with the regional division of the National Industrial Council for the Metal Industry (Nicisemi) which had endorsed the government's Preservation of Pensions Bill. Mawu was not party to the Nicisemi although Alusaf management was, and thus there had been no consultation with workers. In addition Mawu's exclusion from the Council meant that workers had no voice on the issue of wage increases and the company had over a three month period refused to discuss the problem with workers. Membership delegated shopstewards on a particular day to

discuss both concerns with management whilst night shift workers committed themselves to waiting in the canteen for a report-back before leaving for home. Each successive shift waited for the return of the shopstewards until a large tense group of about 1 700 workers was milling around the canteen. They sensed, by the shopstewards delayed return, that something unusual was happening. Nala recounts what eventuated,

> Alusaf had long concrete walls, concrete. The police, commandos, soldiers penned them up against concrete walls, beat the hell out of them. Some guys had eight stitches. Workers forced the concrete wall to collapse for them to get out of there.
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> People knew the people, they worked with supervisors, they were very reluctant to go back and work with them. We couldn't talk sense into that strike because I think what happened had never happened anywhere. Being beaten into a strike is rather different than going out on strike. People were at hospitals, in the shrubs. Richards Bay is built on water. There were people who fell into the swamps and were collected there by ambulances and everything.
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> It was really, really horrific. And workers were angry. The strike went on for a month. They had the right to get a report-back from shopstewards. They were sitting in their canteen. Why they had to be beaten? It was really, really vicious. They didn't want to go back they were really angry.[177]

The strike that 1 700 workers had been `beaten into` almost triggered a general strike in the area. The Alusaf fiasco had created a climate of resistance amongst workers in the area and a strike of 500 Richards Bay Coal Terminal workers, followed by a large stoppage at Triomf, all around similar grievances, increased the tension in the area.[178] Meanwhile workers in other factories were demonstrating their solidarity with Alusaf strikers. After hearing that 12 workers had been hospitalised and 16 arrested and that Alusaf management had requested Grinaker and Fraser Chalmers to lend staff to Alusaf, workers in these factories came out on short solidarity strikes. An area wide Strike Committee was elected to co-ordinate a response to all the disputes. The Committee consisted of representatives from all communities and factories in the area. When police banned meetings in Esikhaweni township, where the majority of Alusaf workers resided, the committee rapidly co-ordinated a stayaway which was fully observed in the township, and partially observed in other townships such as Enseleni approximately 20ks from Richards Bay.[179] This co-ordinated response also resulted in TGWU busdrivers refusing to transport passengers to their workplaces, and in SFAWU workers from pineapple canning factories and from local sugar mills, showing continuous solidarity by adding an extra half an hour to their lunch hour every day and by staging weekly demonstration stoppages to highlight the plight of the Alusaf workers.[180] These solidarity actions ensured, according to Nala, that "the strike was solid...it's really difficult to hold a strike that long. People are used to getting salaries every Friday. It begins to pinch."[181] In desperation companies in the area exerted pressure on Alusaf to settle.

In the first week of the strike Alusaf management dismissed all strikers. Nala was concerned

about union access to the factory as technically it now had no members. In a tactical move she signed up 25 black graduates who were co-incidentally brought into the company during the strike to become apprentices. When the company informed her that it could no longer dialogue with the union because it had no members at Alusaf, Nala drew her trump card and showed signed proof of its 25 members. During the third week of the strike Alusaf dismissed the managing director and brought in a new `liberal` director. After 3 weeks and three days management capitulated and presented the union's proposal for withdrawal from the metal pension scheme to the Nicisemi. It also agreed to establish a provident fund.[182]

Nala recalls that, "After the pension strike I agreed with the company to go up to Johannesburg, meet Seifsa, and get the money back. I drove back from Johannesburg, if anyone had known, I must have had millions of rands in my car, cheques."[183] She returned the following morning to hundreds of workers standing outside the union offices waiting for their cheques, "We had such a braai. Everyone came and ate!" Workers were refunded as much as R 20 000 which they would never have accessed without the union's intervention.

The strike was critical but also spontaneous and co-incidental and again demonstrates the union's capacity to seize an opportunity to make an important breakthrough. The 1982 Alusaf strike was significant because it mobilised thousands of workers into joining unions in the area, and recruitment in its aftermath was greatly facilitated. Vilane, who had been elected Fosatu Regional Chair Northern Natal, recalls how the strike assisted his task by opening up areas beyond Richards Bay to unionisation.[184] Workers in the KwaZulu homeland deconcentrated area of Isithebe, where unskilled labour experienced super exploitation and South African labour legislation did not apply, became ripe for union struggles. It also educated the community on worker issues, and the stayaway had a political impact on people who for the first time experienced the power of community/worker solidarity.

Expansion into Eastern Transvaal

In the same way that Alusaf opened up Northern Natal, so organising Sigma Motor Corporation extended unionisation into the Northern Transvaal; while a dispute at B&S opened up the Brits/Bophuthatswana region. In a similar fashion Highveld Steel and Vanadium Corporation was the catalyst for union expansion in the Eastern Transvaal particularly into the Witbank, Middelburg areas and this foothold was to lead to an even more ambitious plan by the union to organise the coal and electricity power plants in the Eastern Transvaal.

In 1981 Mawu developed the notion, driven by Fanaroff, that the way both to grow the union's power and to build socialism was to take control of the coalfields and the electricity generating

plants in the eastern Transvaal. Explained Fanaroff, "If you're looking for a power base to start to put pressure on the apartheid government, you control all the electricity generation then you're certainly in a good bargaining position... It seemed logical and we could have done it too... We were going to seize power by organising the coal mines, and the power stations, and steel plants, and that would be the heart of the economy."[185] This necessitated the union moving into more remote and less industrialised areas where coal mines and electricity power stations were situated. The location of such workplaces, particularly the Escom plants (Electricity Supply Commission), in isolated eastern Transvaal areas had a history that was rooted in an economic growth strategy which dated back to the post World War 11 period and which was dependent on low-paid black labour. The chairman, of both Escom and Iscor, HJ Van der Bijl, had embarked during the war on a process of deskilling white labour in Iscor in order to reduce the power of white labour and their wages. This he had effected through the withdrawal from the Engineering Industrial Council in 1944 and the forging of a separate bargaining forum for Iscor alone.[186] This resulted in new agreements that altered the pay structures of new semi skilled white workers entering Iscor. The bulk of the work force remained however the even lower paid black labour which would ultimately replace the semi-skilled white operatives. Developments in Escom however took a different path. A strike at the Victoria Falls Power Company in 1944 which involved five of the six power stations on the Rand alarmed capitalists and the state not least because they believed that adjacent collieries would son be making similar demands and taking action. The only workers who did not strike were situated at the more remote Witbank power station. In consequence Van der Bijl evolved a strategy to isolate power workers from the influence of workers on the industrialised Rand through the formulation of a decentralisation policy. After the war he authorised the building of Iscor and Escom operations away from the strike-prone Rand, in Iscor's case to Vereeniging and in Escom's to locations adjacent to rural coalmines. They then shipped in labour from the African reserves. From 1955 onwards all major power stations were built in the eastern Transvaal near coalfields where electricity could be cheaply produced and power transmitted to a widening electricity grid across all regions of South Africa.[187]

In the early 1980s Highveld Steel was the largest employer in the Witbank area and consisted of a cluster of plants employing large numbers of workers (except for the Mapochs mine where fewer were employed). A group of workers on the liaison committee made contact with Mawu in early 1981 and David Sebabi was sent to the area to begin the organising process. Mawu and Numsa organiser Frank Boshielo recalls,

> Highveld Steel was the first factory to be organised in this area... SABS was the first union in Highveld Steel. It was a parallel union organising whites and blacks. I was assigned by two other guys to go and look for a union and we didn't know where to go. We saw Mawu in the newspaper especially in Durban so we phoned the Mawu head office in Durban. Then we met someone who was working for Textile and he connected us with Mawu in Benoni and we met the Branch secretary.[188]

A group of mainly clerical workers who had greater mobility within the company than hourly paid workers rapidly established a network of activists in a similar manner to Volkswagen. Union worker education and recruitment meetings took place chiefly in Highveld's hostels and Frank Boshielo's (a clerical worker) hostel room became the point of contact. A strong sense of injustice and oppression, a committed leadership, and the union's active presence in the company soon attracted members. Assisted by post Wiehahn laws and workers' eagerness to address especially arbitrary dismissals, the union recruited the majority of black workers by the end of 1982. Commented Boshielo, "There was no specific method to persuade workers. They joined very quickly in big numbers. Within three weeks we managed to bring 700 workers into the union."[189] It was in the area of dismissals that the union first gained credibility with workers as it confronted management over the necessity to establish proper dismissal and grievance procedures. The company initially refused union recognition on the grounds that Mawu was not party to the industrial council but once it joined an agreement was signed in 1983.[190]

Highveld Steel's group of activist shopstewards were soon extending their organising efforts to other parts of the Eastern Transvaal, sometimes into extremely isolated areas. Steel and Alloys workers in the adjacent Middelburg were also lumbered with a toothless liaison committee and heard of Highveld's union initiatives. They met up with Boshielo. A shopsteward recalls,

> ... Steel and Alloys was seriously resisting the union... what surprised me was that people were hired this week and next week they were all fired. This happened for years. I complained once ... they thought I was a trouble maker and so they wanted to co-opt me on to the liaison committee and when I arrived there was a small cake and cooldrinks and choice assorted biscuits once you finished your cake. And you eat during the meeting and you can grab the box of biscuits when you leave the meeting. So I liked it. But the dismissals went on. Then SABS was introduced into the company but I didn't join and I saw that SABS treated blacks different from whites and in their meetings was also a big cake and biscuits and dismissals went on. Then we decided to find a militant union.
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> ... Frank Boshielo came to outside the hostel and workers started asking questions like what is a union, and we've heard its got problems when it arrives because all the workers are fired with the shopsteward .... and he'd say that was government propaganda and he'd highlight what the union can do. Then he'd give out forms once we'd ask all questions. But some said, `That Frank Boshielo is going to put us in the shit we're not interested'. We organised then Frank approached management with about 150 members and management said 150 is no use you must recruit 50 + 1 and there are 4000 workers. So we organised meetings and told everyone to recruit a friend and they took forms... Then we declared a dispute...Then after the dispute the company recognised us with about 1 800 members.[191]

This policy, adopted by the union, was driven by Fanaroff and Moses (Moss) Mayekiso greatly assisted by the organising energy of Highveld Steel shopstewards led by the enthusiastic Frank Boshielo. An initiative to organise a Highveld Steel coal mine in Roossenekal led to an approach in 1982 from Tubatse Ferrochrome workers who laboured near the neighbouring town of

Burgersfort in the remote Lebowa homeland. Assisted by Highveld Steel workers, they rapidly attained majority membership and formed an active shopstewards committee. The company was owned by the US, Union Carbide and Mawu used it as a foothold to organise several Anglo American mines in the area.[192]

Meanwhile the union was starting to organise the Eskom electricity generating plants. The first Escom power plant was organised in Germiston, then Highveld Steel workers began to organise Escom plants in the eastern Transvaal. Many plants were situated near a `tied mine` which directly supplied them with their raw energy needs. Escom mines frequently fed coal directly into the generating plants from conveyor belts emanating from the mine head. Thus it was logical that if the union controlled the power plants it needed to control their coal mines as well.[193] Mawu was thus not a mine workers union in the broad sense, but was focussed on controlling the means of power generation in order to ultimately cripple the economy. By 1983 Mawu had made significant inroads into the organisation of mine and power workers[194] but it was plagued by an inability to get direct access to the mines where it had membership.

It was in 1983 however that this ambitious plan began to unravel. Firstly the union met with direct competition from CUSA's (Council of Unions of South Africa) newly launched, in 1982, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). NUM was immediately successful, it had recruited 20 000 members by June 1983[195], and unlike Mawu rapidly gained access to the mines. Commented Fanaroff, "I don't know for sure, this is what we heard from workers anyway, that when Bobbie [Godsell, from Anglo American] heard that Mawu was organising the mines he suddenly dropped his opposition to NUM so we couldn't get into the plants but the NUM could."[196] Fanaroff believed that NUM was also more successful because of its style of organisation which mobilised large amounts of resources. "That's always characterised my way of working. I'm bad at getting together big groups of people. I tried doing it myself. Cyril [Ramaphosa - GS of NUM] put together a big team and hit the ground with a lot of resources and access as well... I don't like taking risk... and you needed to. He was a very good manager."[197]

Secondly the split in Mawu in 1984 had direct consequences for union organisation in the area. According to Fanaroff, David Sebabi who was also organising in the area "...told his homeboys that Moss and I were agents of the state and Moss nearly got killed up there at Driehoek in the chrome mines. David was a homeboy of that area, and the local guys worked in that area of Seshego, so he told them all these stories and it created a lot of confusion so it became very difficult."[198] This danger combined with the ongoing fear that conservative white farmers would exterminate them forced the union out of the area. Fanaroff remembers, "I would pick up Moss at 4 am to be there by 7am, in my `beetle`... and travel home at midnight... Moss and I were

convinced that the farmers were going to kill us on the way home at midnight. There's nothing between Burgersfort and Middelburg and every time we got to Middelburg we'd give a sigh of relief. That road past Roossenekal and out was very lonely, through the mountains."[199]

Mawu had no option but to cease organising in the area and thus its ambitious plans imploded. The Escom plants that it had organised before the existence of NUM remained in the union[200] David Sebabi in his new union, Ummawusa, continued to organise the mines but most collapsed, including Tubatse Ferrochrome, which went over to the NUM.[201] In the process of building the union Mawu was often to make mistakes or to be surprised by a worker or state initiative. In general it was able to retrieve a situation through a review and reorientation of its strategy. The Eastern Transvaal debacle was however a rare case in this period of an unsuccessful and irretrievable outcome.

Expansion into Brits

Introduction

Influenced by the news of the upheavals on the East Rand and of union activity in the Pretoria area, union activists in Brits, a town 50 kilometres from Pretoria, began to organise one of the largest factories in the industrial zone, B&S. The struggle for recognition in this factory is noteworthy as an early example of a new trend evolving in Mawu disputes, the trial of strength. This was a tactic that Mawu had cautioned against during the East Rand strike wave. The trial of strength is regarded as the classic stereotype of an industrial dispute although it is the least used form of industrial action. It embraces a prolonged strike in which employers and workers are involved in substantial costs which finally drives them to a settlement. It is usually employed as a weapon of last resort, as Hyman explains, "It is normally regarded by all concerned as sufficiently momentous an event to be planned with some care and launched only after intensive efforts at peaceful resolution of the question at issue."[202] It will be seen however that in two of the trials of strength described in this chapter - Volkswagen and B&S - the 'momentous' nature of what was being embarked upon was not fully appreciated until workers had initiated spontaneous action. This meant that little preparation had been made before the prolonged strike in terms of prior discussion in the union, strike funds, community solidarity and so on. In each case workers improvised as their strike unfolded and their actions during the strikes varied accordingly. What was critical however, in all three cases discussed in this chapter was the maintenance of solidarity (in the case of B&S for over a year), without which the action could not have been sustained.

Hyman asserts that "to go on strike is to deny the existing distribution of power and authority." In Crouch's[203] interpretation however to ` to deny the existing distribution of power'" does not necessarily mean the concomitant flexing of power. In fact he sees contestation as a union strategy

as being an expression of weakness and the trial of strength tactic he sees as being particularly vulnerable to worker losses. The trial of strength is generally acknowledged as being a highly risky, and hence a rarely embarked upon, form of industrial action. Crouch points out that strikes amongst workers new to unionisation and industrial action are often long and bitter and are frequently caused by employers refusing recognition. He sees contestation as a union strategy in this situation as being an expression of weakness as it is a response to employers refusing to have anything to do with it. Strikers' weakness, he believes, lies in the fact that by leaving their work they lose their means of support and ultimately the employer has the power to dismiss them and recruit new labour. He points out that workers consume all or most of their income immediately, and this means in the first stages of a prolonged strike, so their staying power declines rapidly. Thereafter he believes they are without resources in contrast to the position of the capitalist who has more resources and thus experiences a slower rate of weakening. Crouch's position comes close to Mancur Olson's view that collective action can be regarded as a cost for those waging it.[204] Tarrow believes however that to many it is a benefit even if fundamental power relations are not altered, "For people whose lives are mired in drudgery and desperation, the offer of an exciting, risky, and possibly beneficial campaign of collective action may be a gain."[205] Fantasia takes this further and sees spontaneous, united and militant strike action, especially at a local level, as being "the ultimate base of working class power." He views such action as a sign of strength which constitutes an important boost to the union's power, and an imposition of significant limitations on union bureaucratic and capitalist power.

The B&S dispute described below demonstrates aspects of all of the above arguments but it is Crouch's interpretation with which it is most at odds. There is no doubt that the strikers were in an extremely vulnerable position and the possibility of them exercising power over the company seemed remote. Indeed the longer the dispute continued, and the more impoverished workers and their families became, the more futile the trial of strength tactic appeared. Yet workers won an important victory and their victory ironically derived from the very fact that they consumed their resources in the first stage of the strike and consequently had nothing more to lose. The possibility of attaining alternative employment was also remote in the area. Their victory was their astonishing solidarity. It was a solidarity that went far beyond the strikers themselves in the manner that unionisation in Northern Natal demonstrated. This is where Crouch misses the point, as he fails to locate his comments concerning the power of the strike weapon in any meaningful context and without a context its relative power cannot be assessed. The B&S trial of strength welded large sections of the community together and ordinary people were empowered and politicised by these workers' stand. Crouch's view of strikers' resources is also extremely limited and is confined to a consideration of their financial resources. In the B&S case the workers' struggle engendered waves of solidarity and the concomitant flow of resources from far beyond

Brits' townships. Through union networks solidarity was successfully elicited from left-wing white university students and intellectuals as well as workers in other parts of South Africa. In addition the striking workers' unity and determination acted as an inspiration to struggles being waged elsewhere in the country. As has been mentioned before, such disputes became triggers for the unionisation of entire communities. More than this however they became the sites of deep and connected learning on the exercise of power, and on ways of exerting power in future struggles. In essence the community and its workers were empowered by their knowledge of this struggle as it imparted a new confidence to struggle against their oppression and exploitation. It was a confidence that was engendered by seeing ordinary, uneducated, impoverished but determined, and intelligent people taking on the power of white capital and maintaining an implacable front.

B&S trial of strength

The Brits industrial area was part of the government's `de-centralisation` or `deconcentration` policy which began in the 1960s after the setting up of the Industrial Development Corporation. Its aim was to create industrial zones outside of South Africa's cities and towns often on the borders of impoverished homelands in order to create employment and thereby stem the flow of Africans to white cities. A government statement explained, "...although the Bantu [African] was already proficient in commercial matters, they were incapable of handling large scale industrial development."[206] Government offered substantial incentives including tax breaks, financial aid for the buying of machinery, and the provision of land and buildings at reasonable rentals, to encourage white capitalists to move to these areas. In the early 1980s the government attempted to accelerate its decentralisation policy by offering cash incentives to capitalists to move to these areas instead of offering tax relief. These included cash payments of 95 per cent of the wage bill for the first seven years, loans at low interest rates, subsidised housing for white employees, and, as the union movement grew stronger, the promise of a union-free environment.[207] Unobserved by the world at large, and free of the presence of unions, companies allowed workers` wages and conditions to fall below acceptable survival levels.

B&S was one of the companies which took advantage of these decentralisation concessions and moved from Johannesburg to Brits in 1969. The company was founded in the 1940s as a local family business and by 1980 had achieved the position of being the major steel furniture producer in the country. The business consisted of two plants in Brits - B&S Engineering and B&S Steelbrite. Its financial position was good. Annual results in April 1982 showed that net income after taxation expressed as a percentage of turnover had risen from 6,7 per cent in 1979, to 11,5% in 1980, and 14,2 per cent in 1981. The company was ranked third in "The Sunday Times Top 100 Companies" in 1981.[208] It employed 900 mainly women workers, both semi- and unskilled, who travelled long distances from dry, overcrowded villages and resettlement camps in Bophuthatswana to earn wages of between R196 - R 590 a month. Women workers were in the lowest categories of earners and received significantly lower payment than male co-workers in the same jobs.[209] Workers in the company complained of physical assaults, verbal abuse, searches of private belongings and persons, lack of safety equipment, low wages, and a complete absence of communication between management and workers.[210] Mawu began organising B&S in 1982 and soon won 70 per cent paid up membership. Its involvement in the relatively remote industrial complex of Brits had resulted from contact with a group of young activists who had emerged from the Young Christian Workers (YCW) in the area. Adler recalls their contribution, "Exceptional people who flourish in that small environment and that's true of Oukasie [township neighbouring Brits]. Its leadership was exceptionally strong and deep-rooted and that partly goes back to the early involvement of many of those leaders in YCW which was there before the unions and developed this core of leadership who moved into the unions and politics and the community."[211]

David Moedimeng and Peter Dantjies were two of these activists who were to make an ongoing contribution to the union. Dantjies talks of his entry into trade unionism, "I came into union matters through the YCW. There were about seven or eight of us that were selected in Brits [by YCW]. They formed just small leadership groups and we learnt all about trade unions and worker issues through them. There was a Roman Catholic Hall in Brits that we used a lot. Comrade Dave Moedimeng was already a member when I came in."[212] Armed with information about trade unions, Dantjies began to raise awareness amongst workers at a Brits fridge components factory, Femco, where he was employed after leaving school. His was noticed by management after urging workers not to return to work until a dismissed worker had been reinstated. The stoppage was successful but Dantjies was soon after locked out of the factory which sparked an immediate protest by 500 workers, a hundred of which were dismissed including Moedimeng. The two dismissed men quickly realised that employment opportunities were blocked to them in the area which led them to become full-time union activists, "We went to a bureau of employment and they sent us to an Alpha Romeo factory. But when I got there the personnel said to me 'Are you Peter Dantjies - we'll be taking you back to the employment bureau.' So it was clear to me that we were blacklisted... so I decided not to waste my time seeking employment and to help the union in organising the area."[213]

Despite Mawu's 70 percent paid up membership, B&S steadfastly refused to recognise the union and attempted to undermine Mawu by trying to recruit two members of the shopstewards committee to spy on workers and identify names of union members. The company manager told them that a union was no good for workers, that workers were fools because the union did not pay them and that, "People who joined the union would not go far with the factory." His purpose for recruiting them, he explained, was because "He wanted to use them to get rid of rotten potatoes" in the factory."[214] When this attempt backfired, the company proceeded to fire the shopstewards committee claiming it needed to retrench. Workers struck immediately and the committee was reinstated, but the company still refused recognition. A date was finally set to discuss grievances but a few days before this, in September 1982, management fired the Mawu vice-chairman, and switched off machines. He informed workers that the factory would be closed for three days, and that all 900 workers were dismissed and could apply for selective re-employment two days later.[215]

The union unsuccessfully tried to negotiate reinstatement following which 300 Mawu members gathered to demand a return to work. These protesters were dismissed and quickly replaced by those who accepted selective re-employment, and by unemployed workers from Brits and the surrounding homeland of Bophuthatswana where approximately 40 per cent of economically active Africans were unemployed.[216] The newness of the union in the plant, and the desperate plight of the unemployed in the area, probably accounted for the return of 300 union members to the company for re-employment. In addition, the workforce was recruited through a labour bureau

which had "the power to discriminate against and black-list workers."[217] Indeed one of the issues taken up by workers in a subsequent court case "involved a claim that the companies in the area, united through the Employers Association, influenced the local administration board to prevent union members being employed elsewhere in the Brits industrial complex."[218] About 600 workers returned to the company to get their jobs back and about 400 were re-employed. However, a core of 300 dismissed union members, despite or because of this objective situation, fought on,[219] in what was up to that point, Mawu's longest trial of strength dispute.

Dismissed workers at B&S found themselves in a very different situation from the trial of strength dispute conducted at Volkswagen a year before. B&S was a small family business owned and managed by the Back family and chaired by Back (Snr) who held the 50,12 per cent majority shareholding on behalf of the family.[220] All decision-making was in family hands, they were not accountable to any other party and consequently behaved as a law unto themselves. The workers could not appeal for support to any local or overseas parent company or union movement, nor could they appeal to other workplaces in the area for solidarity as unions were new to the region and factories were not organised. It was workers' strength alone that would carry the dispute. Back family members felt personally affronted by the disloyalty of their workers and this gave the dispute an additional edge. For the family the conflict was not only about money, it was about their role as employers, and the impudence of workers in questioning their authority. Dismissals were intended to punish without tactical consideration as both skilled and unskilled workers were fired including a number of key black supervisors. Here Taffy Adler describes their attitude,

> The conditions were terrible and the management was paternalistic - a small family-owned business. They recruited all their domestics from B&S workers or family of B&S workers. But the way that backfired on them was that when the strike happened the mother of one of the strikers was domestic in the family's house in Johannesburg and the family would talk so we were getting these nightly reports as to what was going to happen in the factory the next morning. It was a great intelligence system. And the family was really hurt by these people turning on them - they've been there for years, they taught them everything they knew, how could they bite the hand that fed them. At times it got quite dangerous in particular the one son was a bit mentally unbalanced and had a gun and he drew that in discussions at the gate.[221]

Mawu was by now sufficiently experienced to know that the critical element in the trial of strength was the maintenance of solidarity amongst workers. It knew that a long running dispute would deplete workers' financial resources and this coupled with family pressures could result in the disintegration of morale and rapidly fragment united resistance. The union therefore assisted the shopstewards committee to develop and sustain the dismissed workers' unity and then relied on shopsteward leadership to guide and educate workers and solve problems on a daily basis. The union in the Transvaal, which at the time only consisted of one branch, was under severe pressure to sustain organisation and direct disputes and strikes that were breaking out everywhere but in particular on the East Rand, and so it called on its sister union Naawu, based in Pretoria, to augment its resources. Co-operation between Mawu and Naawu was not unusual. It stretched back

to the 1970s when Numarwosa/UAW approached Tuacc at the end of 1977 to request assistance with organising textile workers in Port Elizabeth. In turn the CIWW later agreed to aid UAW with the organisation of Sigma near Pretoria.[222] Adler recalls, "Mawu phoned to say they'd had this problem at a factory called B&S - a steel furniture factory... and could Naawu help out."[223] The account below by a member of the B&S shopstewards committee clearly illustrates how Mawu, Naawu and their members conducted a trial of strength. The description illustrates the quality of union leadership, the range of tactics employed by the union in its struggle, and the broadranging educational inputs and discussions to which the union introduced its members. Discussions ranged from the importance of meeting on a daily basis in the Brits church hall, to an analysis of what had happened in the dispute, to the critical importance of the maintenance of unity, to the issue of basic survival and the equitable distribution of scarce resources, and on a more generalised political level on how ethnic divisions could play into the capitalists' agenda. Critically, it shows how the union was able to allay suspicions by allowing every worker the opportunity to voice fears, discuss their situation, and put forward solutions,

> ... some of us had savings and we lived on these and also shared them out. Also people in the community were initially willing to help us out, as well as some of the other workers in the area... We decided that people should report everyday... We began discussing how we were harassed by management, and how workers in other factories were also harassed... We would take examples of people's experiences and get workers to talk and comment. We discovered that if we want to survive here we will have to stick together as this will be the only way to keep the organisation strong. If we depart then it would all break up and people would be weak if they were alone. We spent a lot of time asking people how they felt about the dismissal - whether they thought it was unfair - finally we all agreed it was unfair and we all decided to stick together.
>
> ... we discovered it was possible to motivate the people, and not to separate ourselves from one another by being Xhosa or Tswanas - finding that each and everyone of us is useful to the others... By sharing information and our feelings about the situation in the factory - the bad conditions ... This type of discussion helped a lot because it showed people that if they went to another factory, the situation would be exactly the same and we thought we should rather stick together and fight the situation at B&S.
>
> ...The committee planned to get help from the local churches. We got all the people involved in this by asking each one of them to take a letter to the church in their area. We also planned to get help from other workers in the area... we had no idea we would be out for so long ... There were a few problems when we started getting money from outside as some of the workers did not trust that they were going to benefit - they thought that the money would just go to the committee. This led to a lot of discussions where we explained exactly how the money was going to be used. We explained that we were all in the struggle. Some of us had real problems with transport, and some of the money went into making sure that those who wanted to come to the hall, could... One day I would come, and the next my neighbour would...
>
> There were some problems especially emergencies - people who could not pay for treatment, kids who were sick. The way we dealt with this was to all come together and make a contribution from our savings... Also the committee found that people were complaining that their families were putting them under a lot of pressure, telling them to go back to work. The problems is that some of us are the only member of the family with a full-time job and consequently the families had to make sacrifices for this struggle. This is why we are so close now...we would send a few of the committee members to talk to

the whole family and explain the struggle and what it was all about.

...Each day we report what we have heard about the factory - you see many friends were working there and they tell us exactly what is going on...We have begun to discuss this question of how management tried to divide us.

...Sometimes the workers would ask where the organisers were and whether they had forgotten us as they did not come here very often. We had to explain that they were very busy and that they were proceeding with the Industrial Council and the Court case. When two committee members were arrested under the Intimidation Act, and the charges later withdrawn, this gave us faith in the union that something could be done for us.

...some of us do not eat properly and cannot feed our children like we used to - some of us have sent our children away to our parents. Many of us have to sell our belongings, such as clothes, bicycles and watches, and some of us had goods repossessed. We have now spent all our savings, some of which we had saved for many years and were hoping to buy better things for our children. Some of us have had to sell our goats and cattle and this was very difficult as we sold them for very little.

...People have changed through all the discussions. We have come to realise what it is to sacrifice and stick together and to trust one another - that an injury to one, is an injury to all...[224]

The dispute dragged on for a year during which time the union and workers constantly evolved new survival strategies. As Peter Dantjies, a Mawu organiser, relates, "...workers started to run out of money for basic food and doctors and so on, and so we decided in order to keep workers together we needed to do something. So we approached furniture shops to delay HP payments until the dispute was settled, and we got sympathetic doctors to come out and attend to sick workers and families, and we raised money for food parcels - there were some people at Wits who were very helpful with this." [225]

Mawu made a decision to take the company to the Industrial Court in order to force B&S to reinstate workers on the grounds that the company had committed a series of unfair labour practices, and in particular, that B& S victimised union members. In addition, because the case took ten months to come to court, the union demanded the biggest back-pay claim on workers' lost wages that had ever been made in the Court, an amount of R 850 000. Meanwhile, the Back family, on receipt of legal papers filed by the union's lawyers, and unwilling to admit defeat, decided to sell the company ostensibly because Back (Snr) did not want his son, the general manager, to be dragged through the courts. The company was bought by Gundle Industries and a year later, in September 1983, the new management, not wanting to be saddled with the dispute and costs involved, decided to settle before the case came to court. It agreed to reinstate all the workers, to recognise the union, and to pay R200 000 towards workers' lost wages.[226]

Through the B&S dispute workers in factories, and townships and villages around Brits, learnt about trade unions as dismissed workers spoke in local churches and approached workers in other factories for support. B&S management ironically further spread the union word through its use of

Bophuthatswana radio to urge workers to return to the factory.[227]Levy Mamabolo, a worker from a Brits components factory, Bosch, was one of these people who became aware of Mawu through the B&S dispute so when he came into contact with these activists he eagerly learnt more about the union. Together in 1983 they "worked throughout December. We went from one township to another wherever Bosch workers lived, to recruit. We were determined to recruit 50 + 1[228] of Bosch workers and force the bosses to negotiate with us."[229] The following year, faced with overwhelming evidence of union membership, the company was forced to recognise Mawu. Meanwhile, Naawu was busy organising the nearby Firestone factory where, in September 1983, workers conducted a militant wage strike to demand a R2 living wage. Alfa Romeo was Naawu's next target in Brits and the following year witnessed a successful wage strike in this factory (see Chapter 6).[230] Brits was fast becoming a union town.

Organising in homelands

A consequence of Mawu' expansion in the early 1980s into different regions across South Africa was that workers labouring in remote semi-rural decentralised `growth points` began to approach it. Although Brits did not fall directly under a homeland government, many of these decentralised zones did, and this confronted Mawu with some difficult challenges. Homeland governments were in general strongly opposed to any form of union or political organisation and in addition were not covered by South African labour legislation. Some, as in Bophuthatswana, had enacted viciously repressive anti-union laws which banned `South African` unions. Others, such as the Ciskei, which had not enacted legislation were nevertheless virulently anti-union. Here trade unions were effectively banned. When Saawu opened offices in Mdantsane he was informed by Major-General Charles Sebe, Ciskei's leader, `do what you like in the Republic [of South Africa] and come back here to sleep`.[231] Trade unionists houses were stoned and burned and striking workers' committees detained under vicious detention laws. This was evidenced by striking workers at Mdantsane Special Organisation returning to work only on condition that they were shown that their leaders were alive. Others, such as KwaZulu, were not actively anti-union but nevertheless provided no legislation for the protection of workers. None of the South African laws such as the Wage Act, the Unemployment Insurance, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and the Labour Relations Act which allowed workers some recourse to protection and improved conditions applied in any of the homelands.[232] Industrial Council negotiations, Wage Board hearings, Department of Manpower inspectors, access to the Industrial Court were equally and uniformly denied to workers. In areas such as Babalegi at Hammanskraal near Pretoria, and Isithebe in Kwa Zulu, wages and working conditions were often so bad that some workers said they would rather not work.[233]

In 1984, for example, the starting rate for an ordinary worker in a metal factory in Isithebe was as low as R15 a week. Employers made correspondingly large profits. Skema Engineering in

Isithebe, for example, reported a first year turnover of R156 000, which by 1982 had increased to R4 million[234] In addition, a high degree of arbitrariness characterised management regimes in this area. US company, Tidwell Housing, told workers not to come to work because of stocktaking and gave an assurance that they were on full pay. On pay day workers discovered that one day's wages was missing. There was confusion around how this pay was deducted so workers sent a steering committee to ascertain their hourly rate from management. Management responded by telling workers to calculate their own rate of pay. Workers used the opportunity to raise the issue of an increase. Management's response was to inform workers that if they were not satisfied they could leave the premises. It then proceeded to fire the union steering committee of five workers. When workers requested a reason for this, Tidwell dismissed the entire workforce and required workers to reapply for their jobs excluding the five member union steering committee. The reinstated workers then faced a lowered starting rate - dropped from R25 to R18 per week from which came a rent of R14 a month and bus fare of R15 a month.[235]

Some Fosatu unions, such as the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), deliberately avoided the expansion into homeland areas because of the repressive nature of these structures.[236] Mawu too was concerned by the lack of protection but as a result of encouraging the model of `organised workers organising the unorganised` it tended to follow the lead of its members' organising efforts. "We would have resisted it [organising homelands] but not very convincingly." commented Fanaroff , "David Lewis described us as having `optimism of the will`. We'd get carried away by the sheer power of growing the union not like Johnny Copelyn, (General Secretary NUTW) a disciplined, careful, well thought-out, strategist."[237]

The expansion into homelands was often a consequence of organising an adjacent industrial zone in `South Africa'. This was the case in Richards Bay where the union moved into organising Isithebe in KwaZulu. In its early organising efforts Mawu was careful not to raise the ire of the KwaZulu homeland authorities and hence it avoided confrontations with homeland police.[238] This was to change later when Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi started to view the union's stranglehold on this industrial zone as a threat. Mawu however was fortunate to be able to consolidate organisation before the eruption of violence in the region. This was unlike such homelands as Bophuthatswana where Chief Mangope's hostility to the unions made it almost impossible for Mawu to organise.

In general, homeland industrial zones were small but in some areas such as Isithebe the government had succeeded in attracting some large national companies through the incentives it offered. Again Mawu played a pioneering role on behalf of other Fosatu unions in opening up the area to unionisation, although a number of unions were reluctant to embark on homeland recruitment because of the absence of protective laws. Mawu convinced them however to visit Isithebe in order to comprehend that for Mawu alone to organise in such an area placed it in a

weak position and that worker power could only derive from `the visible presence of trade unions and the threat of strong organisation'.[239] Mawu was immediately confronted with the problem of how to build power without the space that registration and an industrial relations framework offered unions elsewhere in South Africa. It was a return to the 1970s but in a more inhospitable environment where even the limited rights for African workers encapsulated in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act or Wage Act where not available to challenge employers. The strategy the union adopted therefore resembled organising efforts in Richards Bay but also differed in certain respects.

Unlike the Richards Bay area, the union deliberately targeted companies that it had managed to organise elsewhere in South Africa where labour legislation existed. This strategy allowed it to piggyback on worker rights that it had won outside the homeland. Mawu organiser, Willys Mchunu, recalls targeting Henred Fruehauf, Vickers and Lenning, Turner and Newall subsidiary TBA, and Poole Industries and embarrassing them into extending rights enjoyed by their workers elsewhere to this deconcentrated homeland area.[240] In this manner it established some union presence in the area. The union also found itself organising workers in homelands because a unionised `South African` company had one or more plants in the Bantustans. The union would win bargaining rights in one factory in `South Africa` and would thereafter aim to organise workers in all plants with the objective of extending similar rights to these plants. The organisation of an entire company within a particular metal subsector would then have a logic of its own. Henred Fruehauf, for example, which manufactured trailers, would resist granting a wage increase because its competitors, who were not organised, would undercut them. This forced the union into organising the entire trailer manufacturing industry. "This is how for example we ended up organising in Letaba [in the Lebowa homeland]. So it was only the industrial union logic that got us there a lot of the time."[241] commented Fanaroff. There were however many establishments which had no parent company elsewhere in South Africa. In order to organise these concerns, the union adopted the same strategy that it had employed in Richards Bay which was to operate as a general union in the absence of any other union presence. By organising a number of factories across industries, it was able to employ raw worker power combined with solidarity action as a successful weapon. Homeland workers used what Crouch terms `borrowed strength' to considerable effect. Here the absence of labour laws worked in the union's favour. Workers engaged in sympathy strikes, blacking action, and other forms of secondary industrial action, to oblige employers in the area to pressurise the company in dispute to settle. Crouch comments that, `to outside observers these (sympathy actions) often seem like outrageous interference` and that such solidarity has been rendered illegal in a number of countries, including Britain. He makes the point however that there is really little reason for moral outrage "it is through combination that workers become powerful so there is an absolute logic in borrowing other workers' strength from time to time."[242] Mchunu recalls workers using this `absolute logic` through the staging of

sympathy action during a Mawu recognition strike at a light engineering company, Kempher Limited, where all workers were dismissed. Workers from a range of companies in Isithebe took industrial action of various kinds to force their companies to pressurise Kempher into recognising the union. Kempher management capitulated. Mchunu viewed this as a vital struggle in exposing employers to worker strength in the area.[243] Here Mawu organiser, Mike Mabayakhulu, describes the effect of their strategy,

> In Isithebe for instance, there was no legislation so the employer could dismiss at will without reason given. So our tactic was to rely more on the workers' strength, and solidarity action was a big weapon because companies were located on one industrial site so it was easier to use the clout of workers.
>
> So we organised even in the textile industry because there was no other union but Mawu there in those days. Johnny Copelyn and others were very reluctant to organise in Isithebe because they said there was no law that could protect workers. But by organising across industries for unions in Fosatu we were able to create our own base, and employers became more and more scared because they knew if they fired people, they would face solidarity action which would hit all of them in the end.[244]

4. Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the building of union power through industrial action using a selection of pioneering disputes to demonstrate how this power was built. It has illustrated how the power to force union recognition and collective bargaining on employers was progressively built in factories, across industrial areas, and across all regions of South Africa in the early 1980s. The eighties signalled a departure from the infrequent industrial action a decade before as power was built, and industrial action utilised, in a multi-faceted manner. Union power derived from amongst other things the material conditions workers endured, from factory-based democratic structures, from workers' militancy and willingness to sacrifice, from the sheer numbers involved in workplace challenges, and most importantly from the spontaneous nature of industrial action taken by workers and the solidarity forged therein. It is Fantasia's contention that routinised institutional practices limit the ability for union members to pursue collective interests effectively. It is only when workers act independently of established collective bargaining practices and engage in militant direct action that new associational bonds are formed that serve as the basis for emergent social movements. It is also in this process that the value of collective action and mutual solidarity is appreciated and it is this solidarity which he believes is at the very basis of trade union power. This was the nature of the power that metal workers harnessed in the early 1980s. They were not bound by institutionalised bargaining arrangements, even where they existed, and this allowed them the freedom to stage militant action which in ever widening circles drew in more and more discontented workers.

This militant direct action demonstrated a new confidence by workers to determine their own wages and working conditions and to take control of their working lives. With every action, and

each successful outcome, workers were further empowered to develop innovative methods of struggle to overcome obstacles.

The 1980 Volkswagen strike, the 1981 pension strikes, and the 1981-1982 East Rand strike wave were all products of spontaneous action which unfolded in the context of the extension of union activity across the country. They were unplanned actions that in their militancy and unity often took union leadership by surprise. These unions, however, were able to extemporise in highly pressured situations and to thus bring to these actions a refocusing and deepening of demands that struck more incisively at the heart of workers' exploitation.

These unions' were committed to an ethic of worker control which involved them in debate, extensive consultation, continuous assessment, research, and strategic planning. This was a highly successful formula which amongst other things enabled them to establish the concept of a worker-defined living wage, to pioneer the concept of tripartite negotiations, to assail racially administered benefits, and to develop effective worker-controlled co-ordinating structures across industrial areas. Furthermore they made significant incursions into the achievement of union recognition, job security, meaningful wage increases, and improved working conditions. All of these breakthroughs represented a sustained erosion of the constructs of the apartheid state.

In this period both Naawu and Mawu established themselves as national industrial unions through the extension of their services into non-unionised enclaves. Typically, they would establish a presence through a recognition or wage struggle in an influential factory. Expansion strategies varied and encompassed both planned and less controlled growth. Naawu's extension into the Northern Transvaal motor plants and Mawu's expansion into the organisation of coal and power plants in the Eastern Transvaal were clearly strategised actions. Mawu's growth into other areas however was less directed and was driven by its experience of shopstewards councils on the East Rand where organised workers mobilised to recruit and educate unorganised factories. Expansion tactics however varied within this overall model of organisation and were adapted to meet the conditions of workers in particular industrial zones. Organisation in both urban and rural areas drew on the tactics of the more populist communal unions of the Eastern Cape but Mawu adapted these tactics to apply a trade union and worker focus in which the role of the shopsteward was central. In the smaller industrial zone of Richards Bay for example, Mawu abandoned the orthodoxy of individual factory recruitment and successfully combined the strengths of both industrial and general unionism. The model of factory targeting which it utilised in large urban areas was foregone as the goal of organising all plants in the area was embraced.

In different ways however most of these organising efforts were characterised by significant industrial action which greatly assisted in alerting unorganised workers to the existence and power

of unions. Strikes and disputes in such factories as Sigma and BMW in Rosslyn, B&S in Brits, Alusaf in Richards Bay and Kempher in Isithebe, where the nature of ownership differed, were all factories which through intense struggles for recognition and improved conditions, popularised trade unions, and acted as bridgeheads into new areas. Highveld Steel, however, it should be noted was an exception in this regard. Early unionisation was not accompanied by major industrial action but the organisation of the company nevertheless provided an important bridgehead into the unionisation of the Eastern Transvaal. It should also be noted that Mawu's efforts in this area was, albeit rare, an example of an organising initiative which failed and was abandoned.

It is noticeable that workers in remote rural areas were highly susceptible to unionisation despite, and because of their isolation and super-exploitation. High levels of worker and community support, exceptionally committed and high quality leadership, the maintenance of impressive levels of unity, and immense sacrifice over prolonged trial of strength disputes, allowed for a depth of unionisation that had never before been experienced in these areas. Many of these semi-rural struggles were characterised by high degrees of industrial and community solidarity. Workers were drawn from adjacent communities which were characterised by a close-knit dependency and a reliance on these small industrial zones for limited job opportunities. Thus the need to solicit solidarity was often not necessary. This unconditional support gave to these struggles a level of independence and self-sufficiency that was not as evident in urban struggles where workers were drawn from disparate communities. The mobilisation of metal workers in industrial zones countrywide created the genuine possibility of national industrial unions and of unity of action across regions. It also raised the political awareness of workers through the empowerment they experienced in the workplace and through the solidarity lent them by workers in other factories and by residents of local communities. Mobilisation on such a scale was of great significance in the apartheid landscape. Through the organisation of clusters of workers across the country around similar concerns the union was making deep incursions into the apartheid divide a rule strategy. Workers were divided from each other in workplaces, hostels, townships, regions, decentralised zones and homelands in the apartheid state's attempts to shore up racial capitalism and white domination. Naawu and Mawu's national mobilisation was a direct challenge to the splintering of South Africa's working communities. There were no geographical boundaries that these unions were not prepared to cross in organising new members.

Furthermore, present in most of these disputes, was a new locus of power which manifested in the growing political consciousness that workers articulated. This awareness was expressed when workers experienced their exploitation at work on a continuum with their political oppression. Industrial action had shifted worker issues beyond the factory and into communities, and in the case of the pension strikes, into tripartite negotiations with capital and the state. These initiatives beyond the factory floor marked the beginnings of an assertion of power to attain political

concessions.

In conclusion it should be noted that common to most disputes were high levels of worker, and at times, community support, remarkable levels of unity which at times transcended ethnic divisions, and formidable levels of loyalty and commitment to the union accompanied by immense personal sacrifices. News of such struggles aroused other workers to reach similar levels of militancy which had the effect of showing the potential to cement these unions into national industrial centres of power. A remarkable amount was achieved in a short space of time when the obstacles confronting these unions is taken into account.

These unions had mobilised membership countrywide through numerous instances of industrial action. Workers however still mainly experienced their solidarity at an individual factory level, and sometimes at an industrial area level. The issue that now confronted Numsa was how to mobilise workers in the metal sector around national demands in order to effect changes to the entire industry and not just in a piecemeal manner. How Numsa built this national metal identity, and how it built institutions to reflect and empower a national strategy is explored in the following chapter.

ENDNOTES

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[2]. Fantasia, Rick (1988:232/243): *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press .
[3]. Quoted in *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism* (1971:42) Richard Hyman, Pluto Press Ltd, London from "Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy" 1904 published as *Leninism or Marxism?*, 1935 and "Speech to Foundation Congress of the German Communist Party" (1918) respectively.
[4]. Alexander notes however that this did not represent the largest amount of strikers out on strike in South African labour history. The years 1946/1947 which witnessed the mammoth mineworkers and building workers strikes represented the largest number of people on strike and the largest number of `days lost' (in 1947) in any two year period up to 1986. Alexander, Peter (2000): *Workers, War & the Origins of Apartheid: Labour and Politics in South Africa 1939- 48* James Currey Ltd, Oxford.
[5]. Tarrow, S (1998:20): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
[6]. Interview with Freddie Sauls, General Secretary of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 6 Nos 2 & 3 September 1980: 57, 58.
[7]. The following was the basis of the union's claim for a minimum living wage per month based on a 40 hour week:

Rent	R 25
Food	R 150
Clothing	R 200
Furniture	R 60 (Hire purchase payments)
Electricity/Energy	R 20

Insurance (life cover for family)	R 20
Education	R 30
Entertainment	R 20
Vacation	None
Total	R 345 pm (R4 140 per annum - 52 weeks @ R2 per hour = R 4160)

Source: University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department , The Taffy Adler Collection Box C 13.1.4.5.

[8]. I have used Steven Friedman's *Building Tomorrow Today*, Glenn Adler's 1994 PhD thesis: "*The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986* and Martheanne Finnemore, (1984): *The Mobilisation of Black Workers in the Auto Industry in the Eastern Cape 1970- 1983*, MA thesis, University of Port Elizabeth for factual information concerning this strike.

[9]. Quoted in T Detlev, 1996:10, *The IG Metall and the Black Metal Unions in South Africa: Impact and Political Framework of International Trade Union Solidarity Against Apartheid 1972 - 1989*, Masters Dissertation, University of Hanover, 1998.

[10]. In MacShane et al's 1984 book *Power! Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa* they note that international investment was central to South Africa's economic development and that in 1984 there were between 2 000 and 2 500 foreign owned firms operating in South Africa - the largest number being British (1 200), German (350), and then US (350) - 20% of all industry was accounted for by foreign investment making these companies susceptible to international pressure in the way local companies were not.

[11]. Martheanne Finnemore, (1984): *The Mobilisation of Black Workers in the Auto Industry in the Eastern Cape 1970- 1983*, MA thesis, University of Port Elizabeth.

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[15]. Quoted in Adler, Glenn (1994):251, "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It: Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986", PhD thesis. (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University).

[16]. "Union organisation in Volkswagen: interview with vice-president of Naawu and full-time shopsteward at Volkswagen, Uitenhage in April 1984: John Gomomo" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No1 September 1985.

[17]. Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg)

[18]. Quoted in Friedman, Steven (1987:211), *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg).

[19]. Quoted in *Fosatu Worker News*, August 1980.

[20]. Quoted in Adler, Glenn (1994):241, "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986, PhD thesis (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University).

[21]. Adler, Glenn (1997): "Shop Floors and Rugby Fields: The Social Basis of Auto Workers Solidarity in South Africa" in *International Labor and Working Class History*, No 51, Spring 1997.

[22]. Tenzer, Detlev: *The IG Metall and the Black Metal Unions in South Africa: Impact and Political Framework of International Trade Union Solidarity Against Apartheid 1972 - 1989*, Masters Dissertation, University of Hanover, 1998.

[23]. According to Tenzer in 1977 a Numarwosa/UAW delegation attended a seminar in the Federal

Republic of Germany, visited Volkswagen and Siemens, and participated in the IMF Congress in Munich. South African metal unionists also attended seminars of IG Metall in 1980. In 1978 a high ranking IMF/IG Metall delegation visited South Africa. *(*Tenzer, Detlev: *The IG Metall and the Black Metal Unions in South Africa: Impact and Political Framework of International Trade Union Solidarity Against Apartheid 1972 - 1989*, Masters Dissertation, University of Hanover, 1998).5 April 2002.

[24]. Adler, Glenn (1994), "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986, PhD, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University and Martheanne Finnemore, "The mobilisation of Black workers in the auto industry in the Eastern Cape, 1970-1983," MA thesis, University of Port Elizabeth, 1984 . Finnemore gives a detailed account of industrial action preceding the strike.

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[26]. Ibid, p 243.

[27]. Quoted in Friedman, Steven (1987 :211) *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.

[28]. Quoted in Adler, Glenn (1994):259, "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986, PhD thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University.

[29]. Adler, Glenn (1994): "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It:" Race, Class, and Collective Action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986, PhD thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University.

[30]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, October 2003; Friedman, Steven (1987), *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.

[31]. "Deepseated unease over pension funds" Drew Forrest, *The Star* 20 October 1981.

[32]. Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa, Johannesburg, September 1996.

[33]. Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today*.

[34]. Quotes in this paragraph are from a discussion with Professor Philip Bonner in February 2002.

[35]. Federation of South African Trade Unions: "Pensions Panic: A Fosatu Occasional Publication" Fosatu, November 1981, University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department Box AH 1077/ H.9.

[36]. Ibid.

[37]. Friedman, Steven (1987:211) *Building Tomorrow Today*.

[38]. Tarrow, S (1998:21): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

[39]. Federation of South African Trade Unions: "Pensions Panic: A Fosatu Occasional Publication" Fosatu, November 1981, University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department Box AH 1077/ H.9; "Workers should control Metal Pension Fund" *Mawu* No 2 May 1983, personal collection.

[40]. Ibid.

[41]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 2003.

[42]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Metal Pension Fund Board made more representative" No 22 July 1983.

[43]. Metal & Allied Workers Union "To all members - Did you know?" University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, Mawu press statements Box AH 1999/13.

[44]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Metal Pension Fund Board made more representative" No 22 July 1983.

[45]. Friedman, Steven (1987:211) *Building Tomorrow Today*.

[46]. Joe Foster quoted in *SA Metalworker* Vol 2/3 June 1986.

[47]. Taffy Adler quoted in *SA Metalworker* Vol 1 No. 2/3 June 1986.

[48]. *SA Metalworker* "BMW's Provident Fund" Vol 1 No 6 October 1986.

[49]. Hyman, Richard (1972:105) *Strikes*, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow.

[50]. Ibid.

[51]. Hyman, Richard (1972) *Strikes* and Tarrow, S (1998): *Power in Movement: Social Movements*

and Contentious Politics (Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom).
[52]. Hyman, Richard (1972:41) *Strikes*.
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[56]. Ibid, p36.
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[60]. Friedman, Steven (1987) *Building Tomorrow Today.*
[61]. Moses Mayekiso quoted in Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:69): *Comrade Moss*, Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
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[66]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982): "The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 7 July 1982.
[67]. *Fosatu Worker News* August 1981.
[68]. `The Story of One Tells the Struggle of All` by Mandlenkosi Makhoba a Rely Precision Casting worker in his book *The Sun Shall Rise For The Workers/Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi*.
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[70]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982): "The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 7 July 1982.
[71]. Hyman, R (1973:47) *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism* Pluto Press Ltd, London.
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[81]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff , 1996.
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[83]. Fantasia, Rick (1988:243) *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press.
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[89]. Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, May 1997.
[90]. Quoted in Baskin, Jeremy (1982:47): `Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council' in *The Independent Trade Union.*
[91]. Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, May 1997.
[92]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982): `Growth of a New Worker Organ - The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council' in *The Independent Trade Unions*.
[93]. *Fosatu Workers News* May 1982.
[94]. Ruiters, Greg (1995): *South African Liberation Politics.*
[95]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982): "The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave" in *South African Labour Bulletin.*
[96]. Interview Richard Ntuli, Germiston, May 1997.
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[98]. Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Toda.*
[99]. Fanaroff quoted in Friedman, Steven (1987:296): *Building Tomorrow Today*.
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[101]. Ibid, p296.
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[103]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982): "The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave" in *South African Labour Bulletin.*
[104]. Swilling, Mark, 1984:34 `The Politics of Working-class Struggles in Germiston, 1979-1983', *History Workshop Paper*, University of Witwatersrand.
[105]. *Fosatu Worker News*, May 1982:2.
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[107]. Interview with Allen Murray, March 2003.
[108]. Ibid.
[109]. Most workers were eventually taken back within a year - only 14 did not reapply. This strike and other strikes sweeping across the East Rand impacted on Industrial Council negotiations and minimum wages rose by an unprecedented twenty-six per cent that year (1982).
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[114]. Swilling, Mark, (1984:103): "Workers Divided.
[115]. Quoted by Swilling from Webster's "New force on the shopfloor" in *Management* September 1983:16.
[116]. Swilling, Mark, (1984:106): "Workers Divided.
[117]. Ibid, p106.
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[120]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982:86): "The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave" in *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[121]. Swilling, Mark, (1984:117): "Workers Divided.
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[123]. Webster, E : "New force on the shopfloor" in *Management* September 1983:67.
[124]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982:44): `Growth of a New Worker Organ.
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Ltd Cape Town.
[126]. Swilling, Mark, (1984:30) `The Politics of Working-class Struggles in Germiston, 1979-1983'.
[127]. "Branch Structure National Automobile and Allied Workers Union" University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection, Box AH 2065/B 10.1 - C5..1.2.2.
[128]. The Japanese auto producers borrowed an organisational model developed in Japanese industry which was based on company- unions, lifetime employment, and quality circles to improve the quality of mass produced goods. This model was linked to a manufacturing approach known as "just in time" production which entailed the storing of limited stocks of component parts and other materials needed in the production process. This was made possible by the proximity of component suppliers and assemblers which were often found within a single conglomerate. With 'just-in-time' the Japanese achieved time and cost savings in production, with higher quality than was previously thought possible in mass-market production.
[129]. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996 and Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[130]. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
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[132]. Interview with Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[133]. Ibid.
[134]. Ibid.
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[136]. Ibid.
[137]. Ibid.
[138]. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Labour Briefings: Strikes in the Motor Industry" Vol 6 No 8 July 1981:72.
[139]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[140]. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Labour Briefings: Strikes in the Motor Industry" Vol 6 No 8 July 1981:73.
[141]. Ibid, p73.
[142]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[143]. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Labour Briefings: Strikes in the Motor Industry" Vol 6 No 8 July 1981:73.
[144]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
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[146]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[147]. "BMW-UAW negotiations continue" *Fosatu Worker News* August 1980.
[148]. International Metalworkers Federation (1984:48): *Metalworkers in South Africa, The Struggle for Freedom: Report of IMF Mission to South Africa 1984*, International Metalworkers Federation, Geneva, Switzerland.
[149]. " Factory Flashes: Motor Industry" *Fosatu Worker News* December 1980.
[150]. International Metalworkers Federation (1984:48): *Metalworkers in South Africa, The Struggle for Freedom: Report of IMF Mission to South Africa 1984*, International Metalworkers Federation, Geneva, Switzerland.
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[152]. Ibid. In 1983 workers were earning R2,30 per hour, the highest wages in the industry, but this amount had been set unilaterally by management.
[153]. International Metalworkers Federation (1984:51): *Metalworkers in South Africa, The Struggle for Freedom: Report of IMF Mission to South Africa 1984*, International Metalworkers Federation, Geneva, Switzerland.
[154]. Ibid.
[155]. Ibid, p52.
[156]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[157]. "Negotiations in Brief' *Naawu News* Vol 1 No 1 February 1985 The Taffy Adler Collection, University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department,

AH2065/C10; "Wage hike after bitter strike" *Fosatu Worker News*, No 31 August 1984, personal collection.
[158]. Interview Taffy Adler, Johannesburg, May 1997.
[159]. "National Automobile and Allied Workers Union" The Taffy Adler Collection, University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, AH2065/B10.1 - -C5.1.2.2.
[160]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 2003.
[161]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, September 1996.
[162]. Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997. He joined Mawu in 1973 as an Alusaf worker, became head shopsteward in 1974, and Fosatu Northern Natal Regional Chair from 1980-1985. He was Mawu President from 1984 - 1987 and Cosatu Northern Natal Regional Chair from 1987-1989. He resigned from Alusaf in 1991 to establish the ANC Northern Natal region under the auspices of the Maputoland Development Agency. He became an ANC councillor in 1996 and an ANC KwaZulu Natal MEC in 1999.
[163]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Worker Report: Fosatu organizers in Richards Bay" October 1980.
[164]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Richards Bay branch opens - Fosatu grows" November 1980.
[165]. Interview June-Rose Hartley (nee Nala), May 2003. Nala was a worker at Afrotex (a subsidiary of Frame Textiles) in Natal in 1972 when she became active in unionism. She joined the Fosatu National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and became an executive member. She was dismissed from Afrotex in 1973 and became a voluntary organiser. She later joined Mawu as an organiser and became its general secretary from 1977- 1981. In 1981 she moved to Northern Natal as branch secretary to establish the Fosatu region and a Mawu branch in the area. In 1983 she left the union to study at Ruskin College in Oxford. She is currently Project Manager for the International Textile Garment & Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) Southern Africa.
[166]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982:83): "Alusaf Shop Steward Speaks" interview in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No 2 Nov 1982.
[167]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Worker Report: Fosatu organizers in Richards Bay" October 1980.
[168]. Baskin, Jeremy (1982:85): "Alusaf Shop Steward Speaks".
[169]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Worker Report: Fosatu organizers in Richards Bay" October 1980.
[170]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Worker Report: Fosatu organizers in Richards Bay" October 1980.
[171]. Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, June 2004.
[172]. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003. Mchunu joined Mawu in 1974 through the General Workers Factory Benefit Fund. He became a shopsteward at the Turner and Newall subsidiary Ferodo and was recruited as an organiser in 1978 into Mawu's Natal Branch. He worked with Naawu's Brain Fredericks to organise Toyota in Durban. The union sent him to organise in Empangeni in its Northern Natal Branch in 1982 where he remained until 1994. He left Numsa in 1994 to join the KwaZulu/Natal Provincial Legislature where he was the Deputy Speaker at the time of interview.
[173]. Interview June-Rose Hartley (Nala), Durban, May 2003.
[174]. Ibid.
[175]. All quotes in this paragraph from interview with June-Rose Hartley, May 2003.
[176]. The account of this strike relies on interviews with Jeffrey Vilane and June-Rose Hartley both in 2003 and on *Fosatu Worker News* "Thousands strike in Richards Bay" July 1982.
[177]. Interview June-Rose Hartley (Nala), Durban, May 2003.
[178]. Nala comments that it was this strike at Triomf in 1982 that finally alerted the CWIU leadership to the fact that it had significant membership and factories in Northern Natal which needed attention.
[179]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Thousands strike in Richards Bay" July 1982.
[180]. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[181]. Interview June-Rose Hartley (Nala), Durban, May 2003.
[182]. Ibid.
[183]. Quotes in this paragraph from interview June-Rose Hartley (Nala), May 2003.
[184]. Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, May 2003.
[185]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 2003.
[186] This was to later form the basis for what became known as House Agreements whereby particular metal companies bargained separately with unions through the auspices of the Nicisemi after the Main Agreement had been signed).

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[188]. Focus Group interview with Numsa Highveld Region September 1997.
[189]. Von Holdt, K. (2000:85): *From Resistance to Reconstruction: A Case Study of Trade Unionism in the Workplace and the Community (1980 - 1996)*, PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
[190]. Von Holdt charts the unionisation of Highveld Steel in his thesis: Von Holdt, K. *From Resistance to Reconstruction: A Case Study of Trade Unionism in the Workplace and the Community (1980 - 1996)*, PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, January 2000.
[191]. Focus Group interview with Numsa Highveld Region September 1997.
[192]. Ibid.
[193]. Ibid.
[194]. A 1983 Mawu Transvaal Branch Report recorded that it had 1 040 members in the mining sector. The mines that had joined the union were TCL Chrome Mines (500 members), Transvaal Alloys (220 members), Mapochs Mine (140 members) and CMI (200) members. ("The Mawu Transvaal Branch Report to NEC on 7/8/83" University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Fosatu documents AH 1999 C1.13.3.5.4.
[195]. Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[196]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, October 2003.
[197]. Ibid.
[198]. Ibid.
[199]. Ibid.
[200]. Eskom plants remain divided between NUM and Numsa to this day. Technically they should be incorporated into NUM but Numsa Eskom members refused to move. This caused considerable tension between Fanaroff and Ramaphosa at the time.
[201]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, October 2003.
[202]. Hyman, Richard (1972:20) *Strikes*, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow.
[203]. Crouch, Colin (1982) *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action* Fontana, Great Britain.
[204]. Olson, Mancur (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action* Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.
[205]. Tarrow, S (1998:20): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom
[206]. Quoted in *Fosatu Worker News* "Bosses move from homelands to escape from trade unions" Oct/Nov 1984.
[207]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Bosses move from homelands to escape from trade unions" Oct/Nov 1984.
[208]. Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 1 Aug/Sept 1984.
[209]. Jafee, Georgina (1984): "Living with Unemployment: Strategies for Survival" in *Work in Progress* Oct 1984.
[210]. Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 1 Aug/Sept 1984.
[211]. Interview with Taffy Adler, 1997. The YCW was an international Catholic organisation. A branch was formed in 1949 in South Africa by trade unionist Eric Tyacke. The YCW encouraged from its inception an involvement by youth in trade union work. Branches were established in such disparate areas of employment as furniture, leather chemicals, motor, and clothing in Tucsa and Sactu unions. In the 1970s YCW was chiefly concerned with union education and was committed to the development of black leadership. (Lowry, D (1999): *20 Years in the Labour Movement The Urban Training Project and Change in South Africa 1971 -1991*, Wadmore Publishing, Johannesburg).
[212]. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
[213]. Ibid.
[214]. Quoted in *Fosatu Worker News* "B&S to face union bashing charges" August 1983.
[215]. "They're Back" *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1983, No 25 and Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*.

[216]. Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[217]. Quoted in Jafee, Georgina (1984:18): "Living with Unemployment" in *Work in Progress*.
[218]. Jafee, Georgina (1984:18): "Living with Unemployment" in *Work in Progress*.
[219]. Ibid.
[220]. Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[221]. Interview with Taffy Adler, 1997.
222. Ulrich, N (2003) "The Origins of Fosatu: The emergence of trade unions in Natal and the development of a new trade union tradition" Department of History Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand.
[223]. Ibid.
[224]. *Fosatu Worker News* "We will not give in" May 1983.
[225]. Interview with Peter Dantjies, June 1997, a Brits Young Christian Worker (YCW) volunteer who joined Mawu and Numsa as an organiser after the B&S dispute and later became Numsa Northern Province Regional Secretary and an acting General Secretary of Numsa.
[226]. Keenan, Jeremy (1984): "The B&S Closure: Rationalisation or Reprisal?" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 1 Aug/Sept 1984.
[227]. Jafee, Georgina (1984): "Living with Unemployment:" in *Work in Progress*.
[228]. Many companies would not talk to the union unless they had recruited over half of the workers in a plant - this was defined as 50 percent + 1 by the unions.
[229]. *South African Labour Bulletin* (1996:87): "Levy: Mamabolo: The People's Mayor" interview Kally Forrest Vol 20 No 1 Feb. 1996.
[230]. "The Firestone Strike" *Fosatu Worker News* No 24 September 1983; "Jubilant Alfa workers return victorious" *Fosatu Worker News* No 31 August 1984.
[231]. " `Homeland` tragedy: function and farce" (August 1982:44) SSG/SARS Information Publication 6, Southern African Research Service and the Development Studies Group, Braamfontein, Johannesburg (personal collection).
[232]. " `Homeland` tragedy: function and farce" August 1982, SSG/SARS Information Publication 6, Southern African Research Service and the Development Studies Group, Braamfontein, Johannesburg (personal collection).
[233]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Bosses move to homelands to escape from trade unions" No 33/34 October/November 1984.
[234]. Ibid.
[235]. *Fosatu Worker News* "Interview with four sacked Tidwell workers" October/November 1984.
[236]. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[237]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 2003.
[238]. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[239]. Ibid.
[240]. Ibid.
[241]. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, October 2003.
[242]. Crouch, Colin (1982:99): *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action* Fontana, Great Britain.
[243]. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[244]. Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.

Chapter 4
Redesigning the Industrial Council Mould
Focus on Engineering

1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored how Naawu and Mawu built up a substantial power base through nationwide industrial action. The exertion of power in these disputes was chiefly confrontational and oppositional in nature and although disputes erupted countrywide their expression was still fragmented in character. In the case of Mawu this militant thrust from membership pushed the union to the brink of its organisational capacity. As Moses Mayekiso expressed it, "Working as an organiser on the East Rand was the busiest time of my life. I had to cope sometimes with five strikes at a time, going around like a lunatic."[1] This chapter explores how the union dealt with the crisis through the exertion of power in more varied, complex and strategic ways. Through the strategic use of power the union was able significantly to improve workers' wages and working conditions, and emerged at a point where it had sufficient power to engage capital and the state on macro economic issues concerning the restructuring of the metal sector in particular, and the South African economy more broadly.

This thesis will initially focus on the engineering sector which was chiefly organised by Mawu and which later became a discreet bargaining unit in Numsa. This exclusive focus is an artificial one as it does not reflect the reality of what was happening simultaneously in the metal sector, nor does it reflect how union organisation in one sector of the industry was influencing, impacting, and informing other industrial sectors. The complexity of developments in each of Numsa's sectors (engineering, auto and rubber, and motor) however makes it necessary, for the purposes of analysis, to separate out the organisational and bargaining dynamics in each of these areas before threading them together again. This applies in equal measure to economic developments unfolding in the country and in the union during the 1980s and early 1990s. This will be explored briefly in this chapter in order to contextualise events in the engineering sector

The previous chapter demonstrated that union successes in the early years of the eighties were mainly in the areas of establishing a union presence in factories, and in forcing employers to deal with union representatives through formal procedures, sometimes enshrined in recognition agreements, which ensured fair grievance, dismissal, and retrenchment practices. In the area of wages however, Mawu had yet to develop a strategy that would firstly ensure inflation-linked

increases, and secondly increases in workers' actual wages. It was to this area that the union now turned its focus of attention.

2. Joining the Nicisemi

Introduction

Before proceeding to an examination of how Mawu strategically built power on the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi), it is necessary to give some background to the Nicisemi and to outline economic developments in the country, and in the metal sector, during the 1980s. From 1983 onwards, the economic environment became an increasingly volatile backdrop to union negotiations. It is thus important to situate the union's bargaining strategy in this wider context as it influenced its demands, its organisational tactics, and its ability to mobilise members behind its strategies and demands.

The Council was structured in three broad tiers which consisted of the National Industrial Council, six regional councils, and the National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC consisted of elected members from the regional councils. An administrative staff headed by a general secretary was employed by this body. The regional councils administered the Main Agreement and dealt with such matters as employer exemptions from certain provisions in the Agreement, and assessments of inspections of workplaces which were executed by Nicisemi agents.[2] The Council incorporated a dispute resolution mechanism which was slow and bureaucratic and disputes often took up to six months to process. Stages of the dispute resolution process included regional council attempts to resolve the dispute, which, if unsuccessful, was referred to the NEC. If no agreement could be reached, a full meeting of the Council was required, and if still unresolved after three meetings a vote would be taken on whether to refer it to arbitration or to the Minister to enable the institution of a legal strike.[3]

The other main function of the Council was to negotiate the Main Agreement that regulated the metal industry, which included minimum wages and working conditions. Amongst other things the Main Agreement covered minimum conditions on issues such as grading systems, limitations or prohibitions on overtime and rates of payment, provisions for a closed shop, hours of work, annual leave, and sick leave. Other negotiations included the "Fringe benefit" agreements which covered Pension Funds, Medical Aid Funds, the Sick Pay Fund, and training agreements. Sub-committees could be set up to discuss issues in more detail or to attempt to come to an acceptable agreement. Three months before the lapse of the Main Agreement negotiations for the forthcoming agreement commenced. Where negotiations terminated in deadlock either party could declare a dispute. In the case of the unions, they would apply for the Minister to set up a conciliation board and progress

through conciliation machinery, which, if not effective could terminate in a legal strike. In the case of employers they could legally lockout employees.[4]

Once the Main Agreement had been signed, the Minister had the right to extend the Agreement to non-parties. At this point House Agreement negotiations, which had been a feature of Nicisemi bargaining since its inception, would also commence. Iscor had originated the concept of a House Agreement in order to accommodate special company arrangements such as continuous shift operations, which it believed necessitated the negotiation of a separate agreement under the auspices of the Industrial Council. Later, other companies, such as Highveld Steel, also requested exemption from the Main Agreement on the grounds that it conducted special operations. Ultimately all the major iron and steel companies negotiated such agreements separately on the Council after the signing of the Main Agreement. This included such companies as Haggie Rand, Middelburg Steel &Alloys, Feralloys, Highveld Steel and Vanadium, Cape Iron and Steel Corporation, Alusaf, Hullets Aluminium, United Steel Corporation (USCO), Manganese Metal Corporation, Samancor, Kalahari Steel, Atlantis Diesel Engines, Haggie Rand, Dunswart steel, Ferrometals, Cable Manufacturers, Radio Manufacturers and Iscor.[5] By 1988 more than 30 000 workers were covered by companies operating House Agreements. In the early days House Agreements were a strategy to pay less than Nicisemi Main Agreement rates . Although often a replay of the Main Council negotiations with some concessions, they were not gazetted and were thus not legally binding.[6] This strategy would however, later turn against employers, as the union, through strategising in Company Shopsteward Councils, and through some tough industrial action, forced many of these companies to raise wages above those in the Nicisemi Main Agreement.

The Council was founded in 1944 and had since that time operated in the interests of tough anti-union employers and white skilled workers who had negotiated adequate wages and training opportunities at the expense of less skilled black workers. In many cases, these white craft unions operated under closed shop agreements which gave them automatic union members so that issues of servicing and accountability to membership was not high on their agenda. When Mawu joined, fourteen unions were party to the Nicisemi which was the largest industrial council in South Africa. These unions were controlled by the white craft union caucus, the Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU). Employers on their part were represented by various associations that belonged to the Steel, Engineering and Iron Federation of South Africa (Seifsa). Negotiations up to the point where Mawu entered the Council rarely resulted in strike action.[7]

When Mawu entered Nicisemi for the first time in 1983 the Council's scope included the large iron, steel, and metal producers such as Alusaf, Iscor and Highveld Steel, as well as companies in the light engineering and plastics industry which were closely linked to the components sector

involved in the production of parts for the auto industry. In addition, the council covered a range of small producers in the consumer durable sector producing light goods such as burglar bars, security gates, wire fencing, and sheet metal. It also covered the electronics sector which incorporated the manufacture of electroplating, lighting, electrical cables and other communications equipment which in turn embraced radio and television, and a range of domestic appliances such as fridges and air conditioners. Finally, it covered construction engineering including ship building and repair work, the production of heavy vehicles for the transport industry such as trains, buses, tractors and trailers, as well as industrial gear, machine tools, agricultural equipment, tubes and valves much of which was produced in foundries, and in heavy engineering workshops. Mawu, however, entered the Nicisemi just as significant changes were taking place in the composition of the industry.[8]

On the East Rand, as has been noted, the metal industry constituted the dominant economic sector. By 1976, 35 per cent of South Africa companies which employed more than 1,000 workers were situated on the East Rand[9] and by 1983 over 1,000 large companies were concentrated in the Germiston/Wadeville area alone.[10] East Rand companies produced metal goods in two broad areas of economic activity: metal products, or fabricated metals, and foundry production. The metal-products sector employed fewer migrant workers, unlike the basic metals sector. As previously explored, a severe recession struck the manufacturing sector between 1982-1984 especially in the metal sector. This triggered an economic decline on the East Rand for most of the 1980s. By 1984 almost 100,000 metal workers had been retrenched and employment levels in the metal industry had reverted to those of 1973.[11]

The backbone of Mawu's membership in the 1970s through to the early 1980s had laboured in the heavy engineering industry. By 1985 basic iron and steel workings still ranked fourth in terms of East Rand employment (14,591 jobs in 1985), and centred on a few foundries, notably Scaw Metals.[12] Over the next decade this sector witnessed a huge fall in employment. In the 1970s the apartheid state's industrial strategy focussed on a drive for self-sufficiency and its isolationist policies strove to counter international embargoes against its apartheid policies. Its response was to develop large strategic works in key sectors such as transport and electricity. These plants drove the heavy engineering industry through huge projects such as Sasol, Alusaf and the Iscor Sishen-Saldanha railway line. By the early eighties however, sufficient stock and power, combined with a deepening recession, led the government to discontinue the development of large strategic works such as Eskom with its power stations requiring large turbines, and SATS (SA Transport Services) with its ships and locomotives requiring heavy metal wheels and railway tracks. Companies such as Genrec Traction and Signal (Driehoek) which manufactured for SATS experienced a drop in output of 60 per cent in 1984[13] and the manufacture of transport equipment fell by 17 per cent in

1986.[14] The crane-manufacturer Lasch closed down, as did Genrec Ped both retrenching 450 and 400 workers respectively.[15] Reasons given by Seifsa in 1986 for the economic downturn were the rising cost of materials, few new orders, intense competition, large spare capacity militating against the ordering of new equipment; and the threat of sanctions on exports. The rapid decline of these heavy engineering works in turn impacted on a range of light engineering companies servicing this industry leading to the liquidation of these firms and their services, "If you move from the East Rand right through to the West all you see now is crumbling, disused warehouses, and old engineering buildings." observed Numsa organiser, Alistair Smith.[16]

It was in this recessionary atmosphere combined with the decline of sectors of the metal industry and the laying off of large numbers of workers, that Numsa faced employers at industrial council negotiations in the 1980s. Those workers still in employment carried the burden of growing numbers of dependents as family members lost jobs. Against this background the issue of wages was to loom very large in Nicisemi negotiations.

Growing beyond capacity

Between 1980 and 1982 Mawu's membership tripled from 10 000 to 36 500. The union emerged from the East Rand strike wave in 1983 with a membership of 80 000 making it the largest non-racial, but in essence black union, in the country.[17] Recruitment ceased to be an issue. The few union officials on the East Rand were unable to deal with the explosion of worker demands and often left newly recruited members to face employers without support. The union lacked the finances to employ new organisers and most shopstewards, who assisted with organising work, were full-time employed which meant they could not attend negotiations and strikes that broke out during the day. Employers too, felt neglected and complained that union officials were never available in times of crisis. Mayekiso, branch secretary of the union's largest branch, the Transvaal[18], where eighty per cent of the iron, steel and engineering industry laboured in numerous small engineering firms, gave this description of the scope and nature of his responsibilities,

> I began to question the councils [shopsteward councils] because we were not able to give our full support to all our members....In some factories we got a bad reputation because we couldn't give workers a good service. And you must remember in those days management was very harsh. It was a time of dismissals and retrenchments and this weakened the council. In some cases we lost the support of workers because we couldn't cope with all the demands that were made on us.
>
> ...I was responsible for all the Mawu structures in the Transvaal. I had to see that they were doing their job properly - organising those factories that we had targeted and dealing with negotiations in factories that we had already organised. I was also responsible for the training and development of organisers and seeing that everything was working properly within the area. I also had to see to the co-ordinating of the Transvaal branch with the National Executive Committee of Mawu. Education of workers and shopstewards was another of my responsibilities, and training and development of organisers was another

responsibility."[19]

Besides the organisational crisis in the union a bargaining crisis existed that was only in part linked to the capacity problem. For metal workers on the East Rand, Scaw Metals was an iconic plant and the mass dismissals in the company thus represented a `symbolic` defeat for the union's plant bargaining strategy. As a result, in Webster's words' `effective opposition to the national industrial council had been broken.`[20] Mawu now stood at the centre of a terrible irony. It had emerged as the largest union in the industry but employers were refusing to deal with it. The union came to realise that mass worker militancy was not enough to make further gains and it needed a long-term strategy to advance. As Mayekiso observed, "I began to realise that mobilising workers was not enough - there is a big difference between being mobilised and organised."[21] Mawu was thus forced to re-examine its bargaining strategy. Growth was important for the union but the problem remained of how to consolidate this growth, how to direct workers' militancy in the building of sustainable organisation? The union turned to solving this problem in different ways.

Firstly, the experience of the shopsteward councils pointed to the need to develop and consolidate democratic structures at all levels of the organisation. The union needed to revisit its earlier strategy of building strong factory committees to ensure that workers were equipped to resist, or engage with, increasingly sophisticated employers. Armed with strong factory organisation, local shopstewards councils could again play a meaningful role as a forum where shopstewards could debate how to take the workers' struggle forward. The union embarked on the intensive delivery of education programmes to build shopstewards committees and shopstewards councils and to strengthen links between metal workers across the country. Simultaneously it targeted specific sectors and companies to consolidate organisation. It made a decision to focus on plants of a hundred workers or more, and to concentrate its most intensive organisational initiatives on large, prominent companies in Seifsa such as Barlow Rand, Anglo American, and Dorbyl.[22] By 1984 union membership had fallen from its 1983 high of 80 000 members to a steady 36 000 paid up membership.[23] Nevertheless Mawu was not disturbed by this drop in numbers as it believed the union was now grounded in solid organisation.

The Industrial Council debate

Mawu's second initiative involved a more surprising departure. Workers had flocked to Mawu during the East Rand strikes, and elsewhere in the country, because the union was seen as challenging their poverty wages embodied in the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi) Main Agreement. They enthusiastically embraced the unions plant bargaining strategy, where in some cases the union negotiated wages of sixty-six to three hundred percent higher than Industrial Council rates.[24] The union was becoming progressively aware however that no consolidation of union structures could address the servicing

of thousands of small factories countrywide. As Webster put it, "A tension had emerged in Mawu between the growing need for stable organisation and the desire for mass participation in the organisation."[25] Its solution to this problem became clear in February 1983, in what Mbanjwa described as "a decisive moment in the history of the union"[26], when Mawu's NEC voted in favour of applying for membership of the Nicisemi.[27] It was an announcement that startled observers and employers, although within the union itself a process of intense debate had preceded this apparently contradictory move.

Such a move would have startled employers because Mawu and capital's conduct up to this point had been highly combative and not disposed to compromise. The participation in labour /employer institutions in many parts of the world represents an attempt to regulate the conflict between labour and capital. It involves the process of developing a set of rules by which both parties will regulate their relationship. For employers in particular it involves removing themselves from the struggle to maintain complete mastery over their workforce. These bi-partite institutions attempt to reduce the conflict between labour and capital to a manageable set of defined issues which are represented through a set of demands and mechanisms for the resolution of disputes. They are thus a means of predicting where compromise is necessary in order to avoid an industrial confrontation. This was not the nature of Mawu's interaction with capital. In fact it is interesting to question why Mawu, in pursuing the route of aligning itself to a bargaining institution, chose the traditional industrial council as its preferred expression. Crouch has commented that unions tend to opt for whatever is familiar in their national repertoire.[28] Thus, however much Mawu and its members rejected the Industrial Council as an unrepresentative body it was the institution that had characterised the South African labour relations landscape since the mid 1920s. Unions, in particular the Western Province Motor Assemblers Workers Union (WPMawu) and Numarwosa, which had moved closer to Mawu on the IMF in the late 1970s and early 1980s had long bargained through such institutions with considerable success. In all probability a move into an unfamiliar system would have been treated with hostility by workers and with a fear by the leadership that it would be less able to exercise power and influence in an unknown forum, despite a lack of previous participation on such a body. Obviously institutionalisation of labour relations is a matter of degree and this was something that Mawu and later, Numsa, keenly appreciated. There is a big gap between bitter and at times violent struggles where a range of social and industrial grievances are combined, and formalised, bureaucratic bargaining arrangements where unions and employers regulate all employment conditions. Between these opposite poles a `wide space` exists which can be filled with different levels and types of institutions and with a combination of formal arrangements and industrial action of various kinds and degrees.[29] This was a wide space that Mawu, Naawu and Numsa would make effective use of even whilst participating in an institution which was committed to reducing the adversarial nature of the relationship. Thus although these unions made

use of an existing and known institution which incorporated a set of traditional understandings and procedures, they were to pursue a very different kind of strategy around this forum and to use their strategic and tactical skill to subvert it.

For at least 18 months prior to Mawu's decision to join the Nicisemi, Fosatu had engaged in debate amongst union officials and shopstewards in its affiliates (including Mawu) on the merits of abstention or of participation on Industrial Councils in what then Mawu Transvaal organiser, Enoch Godongwana, remembers as "a long democratic debate."[30]. Education sessions and materials of the period, particularly 1981/2, reflect this sustained focus. Fosatu's "General outline for policy seminars" in 1981 records as its first item, "1. Industrial bargaining - The general problem to look at is the pros and cons of industry wide bargaining, and the limitations of plant based bargaining which has given rise to the debate." [31] Other seminars on Industrial Bargaining which were recorded as taking place, chiefly in Natal, Transvaal or at a national level, record such comments as, "Surprisingly the issue of bargaining inside or outside industrial councils was not contested directly. The Seminar was useful in that it brought parties together who had previously opposed each other on this question. Participants were able to develop a better awareness of positions being taken by the others. And of the concrete contexts confronting other industries."[32] Typically the arguments that emerged in these seminars were as follows. The advantages of joining an Industrial Council were that pressure could be exerted on employers across the industry, that greater efficiency was possible in dealing with issues common to all factories, that power could be exerted around major issues common to all factories, that plant level rights could be entrenched at industry level which would favour weak individual workplaces, that the union could grow more rapidly when the struggle was conducted on an industry wide front, that in plant based struggles power was limited and single factories could be isolated and unity smashed, and that a focus on plant based struggles had the danger of generating "sectional consciousness." Disadvantages advanced were that industry bargaining could replace or undermine plant bargaining, that past experience had demonstrated what happened to unions who did participate, that the vital importance of grass-roots participation and democracy would be lost, and that the struggle over managerial rights and control in the factory would be undermined.[33]

Ultimately these arguments resolved into an acceptance that there were advantages and disadvantages to both industry and plant based bargaining and that,

> What is needed is a system where each complement the other. It is simply not sufficient to argue that industry bargaining is premature because our unions are not representative in entire industries ... The concentration of industrial power under large monopolies requires an effective counter. Such companies are far too powerful to confront in industrial plants... they can simply ride out conflict in particular plants, or even close them down.
>
> There will always be a danger that once establish [sic] an industrial bargaining system

> leaves space for degenerative effects on shopfloor organisation. This however can be countered and the positive approach is to identify the problem areas and develop means of counter acting such effects.[34]

Thus the conclusion to the debate was that, "There should be two-tiered negotiations, with plant based negotiations a condition of any national negotiations" and that "Unions should consider the Industrial Council in a tactical way based on their own representivity, the strength of employers, and the nature and structure of the Council."[35]

For Mawu however, its dramatic change in policy seemed to emanate directly from its defeat at Scaw Metals where employers broke worker opposition to bargaining on the Industrial Council. There were other reasons however for the union's decision to join the Council. One of these was its longstanding vision of building power to effect fundamental changes to the industry. Mawu's growth and consolidation had strengthened its position in the industry, particularly as it now had members in large and influential companies nationwide. This placed it in a better position to bargain over common demands as this 1983 union statement made clear,

> ...Mawu has grown into a national union with about 200 organised factories... Mawu has reviewed the events of the past year. All the strikes were over the same issues - wages, pensions, job security, retrenchment. Although the strike wave assumed industry wide proportions the strikes themselves were fragmented. Workers in different factories did not unite in their demands.
>
> Mawu has made various attempts to overcome this problem, as for instance in the campaign on the East Rand against retrenchment: this campaign was conducted through the shopstewards council. However, it has become clear that Mawu needs a focus around which workers can unite their demands. Industry-wide bargaining is needed for this level of mobilisation of members.[36]

It was the scope of the Industrial Council that attracted union strategists. The union recognised that with limited resources it could negotiate once a year, and through their power in a number of large, well-organised factories effect changes in a host of small, weaker factories. As Fanaroff explained, "We began to see that we couldn't bring workers together to use their maximum power in the industry. The question was how can we bring workers together so that when we strike we improve conditions in the whole industry, not just here and there. If we could focus workers' attitude on one thing then we could build a campaign around it and recruit more quickly."[37] In addition, Mawu had the advantage of observing this theory in action in Naawu's industrial council negotiations, which united worker demands, and enabled solidarity action across factories resulting in some significant gains.

Union strategists in the Transvaal were not however supported by the Natal branch of the union where most of Mawu's national leadership was based. The scale of organisation was much smaller in Natal and organisers were still fighting for recognition on a factory by factory basis. Geoff

Schreiner, who was Natal branch secretary at the time, comments, "I think Natal had the greatest success in that early eighties period in signing up recognition - by the time of the IC [Industrial Council] there must have been 30-40 recognition agreements signed."[38] The Natal branch would only come to identify with the Industrial Council strategy at a later date. In the meanwhile, it was focussed on a battle at a Nedcor company, Hart Limited, which became the centre of their plant bargaining strategy. The union asked the Industrial Court to rule that it was unfair for an employer to insist on bargaining at an Industrial Council alone. The branch put significant resources into this legal struggle importing prominent labour lawyers as well as experts from the United States, but they lost the case in 1985 when the court ruled that employers could not be forced to bargain at plant level. According to Mawu organiser, Bobbie Marie, this defeat, as with the Scaw defeat in the Transvaal, "... was the turning point that convinced us we have to accept the IC strategy."[39] Moreover, the leadership in Natal realised that they did not have the capacity to follow-up on all their recognition agreements. Schreiner comments, "The problem was we couldn't sustain those agreements. Soon after they were signed it was very difficult to build onto those agreements."[40]. Joining the Industrial Council, it realised, would guarantee regular negotiations around wages once a year, and release the union better to service agreements. "The problem with plant recognition agreements" Rolly Xipu, a Numsa Springs organiser commented, "was that we had different agreements. In weak companies wages were low. In the strong companies, wages were high. Once we entered the NIC system, that increased membership because now we were negotiating across the industry."[41]

Moreover, there were other reasons for Mawu to join the Industrial Council. In the wake of the East Rand strikes a number of establishment unions on the Council began claiming to speak for black workers and adopted popular Mawu demands, such as the minimum R2 an hour wage demand and the demand for negotiated retrenchment and dispute procedures. This angered Mawu members who believed they were not negotiating these demands in good faith.[42] As Richard Ntuli relates, "We went to a workshop in Pietermaritzburg to work out how to participate in the IC... I was the only one supporting going into the Council because I felt we were just shouting outside of the fence and they were on the other side doing what they want to do - we send our demands there, they swop our demands to suit themselves, and no-one is going to defend our demands."[43] Advanced worker leadership, like Ntuli, understood that decisions taken in this forum controlled the whole industry, and that the union needed to challenge employers and unrepresentative unions on the council who felt entitled to determine conditions on black workers' behalf.

Ntuli indicates that in the early days considerable opposition to joining the Industrial Council existed. Marie recalls that the union was `recruiting workers on the basis that you were going to negotiate wages at plant level.`[44] A Mawu publication likewise declared, "We did not want to join

the council because it was dominated by conservative and predominantly white trade unions. We did not want to be caught up in a bureaucratic mess. We demanded that our shopstewards must negotiate their conditions at plant level."[45] There were sound reasons for the union's suspicion of industry negotiations when the Council's history and composition were taken into account.

Both Mawu officials and members feared that participation in the Council would remove the struggle from the shopfloor as the structure of negotiations on this establishment body made it difficult to be directly accountable to membership. Mawu was also concerned that members' vigilance and militant spirit would recede as Council negotiations improved conditions and trusted union officials negotiated on their behalf, leading to a form of bureaucratic unionism that characterised Tucsa.[46] This amounted to an extension of the registration debate that had raged a few years earlier. One of the major critiques of registration had been that it would embroil unions in Industrial Councils and that this was an inevitable route to bureaucratic trade unionism.

The union canvassed the opinions of members and officials on these issues of workers' control and democracy through a range of union structures - NECs, BECs, staff meetings, seminars, workshops, and shopstewards councils. Godongwana recalls a large shopstewards council meeting in Katlehong where shopstewards across the Transvaal discussed the issue and voted overwhelmingly to join the industrial council.[47] The debate was not confined to Mawu; it was one that was argued across the independent labour movement as unionists grappled with issues of how to build efficiency and power. According to Marie, "Fosatu was pro-IC because of efficiency, GWU [General Workers Union] and Food and Canning [Workers Union) were opposed to the IC because it takes democracy away from the base. And Saawu were [sic] opposed because it lent legitimacy to apartheid."[48]

To counter these arguments, those in favour of entering the Industrial Council, responded in a characteristically pragmatic manner. They argued that the Council offered a number of useful administrative benefits which would have important organisational implications. Most important amongst these was the Councils centralised stop-order deduction facility whereby Mawu would automatically receive membership subscriptions wherever it had members in a company party to the Council. This would mean the end of tedious and time-consuming hand collections and negotiations where the majority of companies continued to refuse stop-order facilities. Furthermore, they stressed that joining the Council was a tactic, not a principle. It was a strategy to consolidate power, and that the ineffectiveness of the Council was not inherent in the Council system itself but was due to the establishment unions party to the structure. They acknowledged the many traps the Council system held for the union but argued that the history of strong shopsteward organisation, and democratic practices, would neutralise these threats. One of the

most important arguments advanced was that entering the Council was not a zero sum game in which industry wide negotiations could only proceed at the expense of plant based bargaining. They pointed out that the Council only negotiated minimum wages and conditions, and that the union would continue to plant bargain on all other matters pertinent to individual workplaces - including negotiations on actual wages. They argued that Naawu had avoided the pitfalls of over-bureaucratisation and that workers, not employers or the state, were very much in control of this union. In addition, to guard against the possibility of co-option on the Council, they proposed that the union lay down certain conditions to enter. These conditions stipulated that Mawu had the right to withdraw from the Council at any time; that the union would not sign an agreement that was not endorsed by membership; that industry wide bargaining would not replace the right to bargain at plant level; and that the Council must allow time, and facilities, for the process of mandates and report-backs during negotiations.[49]

In this pragmatic approach to joining the industrial council Mawu intellectuals were true heirs to the Gramscian tradition. A notable feature of Gramsci's Marxism was its open-minded, nonsectarian approach. His goal was to build a theory that was relevant to the masses and thus he was available to the borrowing of ideas, innovations, and findings of bourgeois origin. His theoretical works were distinguished from most contemporaries according to Boggs, by its "...searching, probing, tentative character; attempts to construct a closed system consisting of scientific certainties, absolute truths, and formal abstractions could only isolate Marxists from the masses and stultify processes of revolution."[50] Gramsci opposed `abstentionism` or the non participation by socialist in bourgeois institutions as constricting leftist dogmatism. Mawu's attempts to redesign the industrial council as one of a number of strategies to wrest power from capital fell decisively within this spirit.

Fortified with these conditions, the union made the decision in 1983 to join the Industrial Council declaring that,

> We must never rely on the council to solve workers' problems. We must continue to build shopfloor organisation and strong shopstewards in all factories. If we leave this strategy we will have no power at all... The present unions don't involve their members in council negotiations but merely inform them when everything is finished. As long as our members have a clear sense of direction and we keep our organisation strong, we can continue to be a democratic union fighting for workers' rights. We must take the struggle forward always.[51]

Mawu's application was accepted and the union immediately made it clear that worker delegates with mandates, and not paid officials, would represent it at the bargaining table in open negotiations. The union refused to be limited by a set number of delegates laid down by the Council, which up to now had only catered for the general secretaries of each union to attend who

sat in a small, closed meeting to negotiate the agreement.[52]

The Industrial Council strategy had been robustly debated and accepted by the union but in reality both leadership and membership were still firmly focussed on the campaign for plant level bargaining. Council negotiations were of secondary importance, and leadership warned members that Mawu had limited power as a minority union in this forum. It adopted an `all level bargaining strategy` which entailed the continued emphasis on building factory power, including a particular focus on the organisation of large employers who shaped Seifsa policy. The union approached Council negotiations in a characteristically defiant way, "... as organisers we went into the IC on the basis that you [the employers] negotiate wages or else we fight you." stated Marie.[53]

3. Building the Living Wage Campaign

Introduction

Whilst employers reposed in the wake of the Scaw dismissals in the belief that they had finally broken the back of the militant Mawu, the union was gearing up for its first set of industrial council negotiations in April 1983. Conscious of the significance of this moment where for the first time in the institution's history an African union was participating, the union was nevertheless not intimidated by the power of this body. As Mawu president Jeffrey Vilane commented, "Mawu went there fully knowing about the bureaucrats in the institution. We were not taken by surprise."[54]

The Nicisemi covered 8 400 companies nationwide through six regional councils, in the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal, Border, Midlands and the Cape. It embraced 380 000 unionised and unorganised metal employees, over half of them being African, for whom it had the power to set minimum wages which the Minster of Manpower published annually in the government gazette.[55] The union faced the largest employer organisation in South Africa, Seifsa, which represented 56 employer associations and included powerful conglomerates such as Barlow Rand, Anglo American, Iscor, Gencor, Metor, and Siemens. In addition it confronted a range of white craft unions, including Yster and Staal and twelve unions which fell under the umbrella of the CMBU. These unions represented 160 000 white skilled workers[56] who were determined to maintain their hold on the bargaining process and which had for years unilaterally set high rates of pay for skilled white workers, and poverty rates for semi- and unskilled African workers. These were unions which had once fought militant battles to attain the ear of employers and which had now, in a similar manner to the bureaucratic unions of the USA that Fantasia investigates, "...sought a measure of legitimacy and social standing ...at the expense of workers' solidarity as their prime

source of power" and which saw the mobilisation of working class solidarity "as a threat to the ordered, bureaucratic machinery of the grievance process and labour board."[57]

Prior to the first meeting, Mawu had taken its first steps to changing Nicisemi's bargaining culture. It demanded that the tradition of receiving Seifsa proposals the night before negotiations be altered and insisted that proposals be circulated a week before to enable the union to canvas worker structures and receive mandates. At the meeting the union demanded the right to broad based participation by Mawu leadership. The entire NEC (all of them workers), branch secretaries, and the general secretary attended and the union avoided nominating a single spokesperson expecting, instead, all Mawu delegates to participate. "We spoke in Xhosa at [Nicisemi] meetings in 1983 saying we want to change the culture. Harassing them [the employers]." remembers Godongwana.[58] It was a style of negotiations that unsettled the white unions, even though Council rules allowed for 100 representatives for unions and employers. The previous pattern of negotiations had involved white unions represented by union officials who nominated a single spokesperson, usually Ben Nicholson, general secretary of the CMBU, to negotiate with Seifsa's Sam Van Coller. The Council was forced to concede this change in bargaining culture. This was however where Mawu's power on the Council ended. Negotiations, which set a pattern for some years to come, became a game of power, played out in a combination of posturing, frustration and anger where, according to Marie "neither party was playing it straight."[59]

Early demands on the Nicisemi

From the beginning Mawu's demands on the Industrial Council centred around the acquisition of a living wage. This it defined as a fight for wages that approximated more closely to workers' actual needs, in the manner that union members at Volkswagen in 1980 had insisted. In 1983 this was set at R2 an hour. Here Alec Erwin, Fosatu's National Education Officer, explained why "a wage rate of R2, 00 per hour is not just a product of our [Fosatu's] manipulation."

> A Living Wage ... has a number of components. Firstly, it is a political and moral statement. It relates not only to costs, productivity and profits but to human dignity, self-respect and material well-being...
>
> Secondly, it is a specific reaction to wage setting by poverty measures such as the PDL or HEL or SLL or whatever... Workers are not interested in *bargaining* for wages that barely keep both feet out of the grave.
>
> Thirdly, the actual wage called for such as Fosatu's R 2,00 per hour is more a rallying point than the whole content of the Living Wage demand. The living standard offered by R2, 00 is no great shakes yet it is well above the level of many industries... I believe many industries could move there rapidly. More important we in Fosatu derived the R2,00 by the relatively crude but effective device of asking people what they actually spend..."[60]

Having adopted the R2 as its initial living wage demand, Mawu's future demands on the Council centred around an inflation linked minimum wage for the semi-and unskilled categories of workers

it organised. Over the next four years the union reiterated a similar living wage demand varying it according to changes in workers' cost of living (see table below). In addition it employed maximum increases achieved in plant level negotiations to benchmark wage demands at Industrial Council negotiations. In 1983, for example, Mawu succeeded in raising the minimum wage above R2 per hour in 25 plants (the maximum increase negotiated was 39 cents per hour over the Council's 10 cents increase).[61] In the 1984 Nicisemi bargaining round it thus made the demand for a R2.50 minimum despite not having achieved its R 2 demand in 1983 negotiations.

Date of Nicisemi negotiations	**Minimum demand per hour atb (based on 45 hour week)**
1983	R 2. 00
1984	R 2. 50
1985	R 3. 50
1986	R 3. 50

Although the demand for higher wages was uppermost in workers' minds, the union advanced other equally recurrent demands which mainly concerned the problem of recession-triggered retrenchments. Between 1982 and 1984, about 70 000 metal[62] workers had been laid off. The union pointed out in Council negotiations that this was not unconnected to the demand for a living wage, observing that "...more unemployed people were living off our wages. Our wages are actually decreasing."[63] Mawu also linked wages and employment creation in other ways. It put forward the demand for a 40 hour week both as a job creation strategy and to assert an international norm for working people which allowed for adequate periods of rest. In addition, it asked for a limit on overtime and an increase in overtime rates (a maximum of five hours overtime paid at double rates during the week and triple rates on the weekend) in the hope that this would either appropriately compensate workers for over-long hours of work, or force employers to recognise that by reducing overtime they could retain more jobs.[64] As Vilane put it, "Workers should not depend on overtime to get enough money. They must get a living wage and a shorter working week, so they have enough time for themselves, and so there is more work for more workers."[65] Mawu also advanced the linked demand for decent periods of consultation around intended retrenchments to allow for employer/union discussions. The union, influenced by Naawu, proposed the concept of a one month notice period for weekly and monthly paid employees to allow time to seek alternative employment; a retrenchment package (by 1985 this had become a demand for one weeks pay for every year of service in the company); and a procedure for laying-

off workers. These were standard demands in each year of negotiation from 1983 - 1986 although in later negotiations, 1985 and 1986, other demands were added such as six months paid maternity leave, May Day as a paid public holiday, the right to strike without fear of dismissal, increased contributions to pension funds, and four weeks paid holiday.[66] The union persevered in its demands hoping to wear employers down through sheer persistence and the logic of its arguments.

In 1983, at Mawu's first Council negotiations, its Vice-President, Andrew Zulu, in an opening speech, argued that employers should take the union's wage demands seriously because:

> In the last five years companies have made record profits every year. In real terms profits of almost all major companies for which we could find results have increased by more than 30 - 50 per cent... But as soon as the recession hit, the employers forget the good years. They tell us they have no money. But they are still making big profits. And where is the money from the last five years?... It seems that Seifsa does not care about the retrenched workers and their families who are literally starving in the rural areas.[67]

The union soon realised that Seifsa employers, despite their insistence on bargaining at Council level, had no serious intention of bargaining in good faith. It became clear that Mawu was confronted with an issue of power confined for the moment to a war of words as the union accused employers of "playing games" and of paying lip service to the concerns of its African workers, declaring that, "We will not be used as window dressing while Seifsa continues to sign agreements with old minority unions."[68] Employers may have squirmed in their seats but they nevertheless continued to forge an alliance with the white unions, especially CMBU. Each trade union and employer representative had one vote. At the time there were 14 employee parties (trade unions), 12 of which were CMBU unions. Mawu had one vote and represented about 5 per cent of workers covered by the Industrial Council Agreement and was therefore "totally unrepresentative and highly vulnerable to Seifsa's combined strength."[69] Thus in 1983 an employer/white union alliance meant that Mawu was overwhelmingly outvoted. In 1983 Mawu demanded a minimum wage of R90 a week (R2 per hour), and a R18 across the board weekly increase. It demonstrated that the cost of living had increased by 15 per cent and items such as bread, vegetables, and transport had increased by more than 150 per cent, whilst migrant workers could not rely on a home crop because of severe drought.[70] The employers' response was to offer a R3,15 a week (8 cents per hour), an increase of 5 percent, whilst refusing the union permission to inspect their books.[71]

Negotiations deadlocked and Seifsa bypassed Mawu and signed an agreement with the white unions for a 10c an hour increase. Mawu refused to sign the agreement. The union's source of power still lay in individual factories and it began to mobilise membership to plant bargain using the demand of R90 minimum a week.[72] Thus a bargaining pattern was set for the next few years whereby Mawu rejected Seifsa's offer and put forward its living wage demand, only to be outvoted

by an employer/CMBU power bloc. It would then refuse to sign the agreement and revert to plant level negotiations in order to better low Council increases. In 1984 Mawu again made the bold living wage demand of R2.50 an hour. At the time the Industrial Council minimum for the lowest paid worker stood at R1,53 per hour. Seifsa rejected the demand and settled with the white unions on a R1,70 per hour minimum which represented a meagre 17c an hour increase.[73] The 1985 settlement again mocked Mawu's R 3,50 an hour demand as employers and CMBU agreed to a R1,90 an hour at the minimum.[74]

Building alliances & the Living Wage Campaign

When Mawu joined the Nicisemi it was aware of the dangers that centralised negotiations held for workers' control over the bargaining process. By 1986, for example, the Council covered 366 796 metal workers in 8,926 factories.[75] This made direct representation of each of the factories concerned impossible. Consequently the union made a concerted effort to educate, inform, unify and mobilise members around the Nicisemi in order to involve workers countrywide in collective bargaining through a system of report-backs and mandates. Nicisemi negotiations were held in Johannesburg so this was a difficult task. As Bobbie Marie, recounts,

> There was a continuous process of seeking mandates, processing the mandate, reporting back, negotiating, seeking fresh mandates, then back to negotiation. During national negotiations, all the chairpersons of the local shopsteward councils would be sitting in the next room. They would push the negotiators hard because they wouldn't be hearing the difficulties that the negotiators were having. The chairpersons would be toyi-toying[76] next to the negotiators. It was a difficult communications exercise.[77]

Sometimes, hundreds of shopstewards were bused to wage talks, and Mawu hired a hall next to the negotiations. As soon as bargaining finished, the union wrote a pamphlet reporting on progress and sent it to all factories the next day. Shopstewards called workplace general meetings, and on the weekend shopstewards councils in every local discussed bargaining progress. Over time, as the union grew, the need for more co-ordination and better communication with members became apparent. Union growth improved Mawu's financial position as money from Industrial Council check off facilities flowed in. This allowed for the organisation of national campaigns. Mawu organiser Geoff Schreiner detailed this process,

> This huge shopstewards chairpersons caucus which sat outside the negotiations, where we flew people up from all the provinces - about 150 -200 shopsteward chairs, and a small negotiating team of about 30-40 people went into the negotiations. Then come back to this caucus of shopsteward chairs, and then they'd go off to the phones to be in contact with their provinces and factories. There were also local rallies, regional, and then this national group. People on the negotiating team would go back to the provinces, and again there were mass rallies at Curries Fountain or Bolton Hall. It put Mawu on the map - we were now the union that everyone was going to pay attention to.[78]

Schreiner's comment that "it put Mawu on the map" needs to be unpacked. The union had viewed the joining of the Industrial Council primarily as an 'organizational benefit'. This included the

belief that, “Instead of having a Union which was a collection of scattered factories we wanted to mobilize our members around issues on a national and regional level... the Industrial Council would be an important ‘point’ around which we could mobilize our members on issues such as wages or working conditions.”[79] It was this intention combined with a concern to retain workers’ control over the bargaining process, that led Mawu to devise means to keep workers informed and involved. In the process of doing this Mawu began to engage in a sustained national campaign which simultaneously mobilised members and shopstewards in every region and branch of the union with an intensity and on a scale not attempted or witnessed before. The whole process was immensely contradictory and even perverse. Unequal power relations in the Council, and the need by union strategists to fend off charges that they were being co-opted or bought off, led to a national mobilisation *against* the Council, simply by virtue of joining it, alongside a continued reliance on the local fragmented plant based bargaining of old. As Vilane recalls, “We said: Let us go there but let us keep our programme, our weapon, outside of that thing. So the campaign we made against the IC itself.”[80] Workers were focussed on resistance to low Council increases through a drive to plant bargain where they had control over demands and outcomes. Marie describes how workers resisted a move towards the Industrial Council as the prime forum for negotiating wages, “It took a long time for workers to accept that they won’t be going to negotiate wages at plant level, and they had to wait for the IC... Workers want money here and now...Where workers would say they want [higher] wages you would say `No comrade, there are two issues, we now need to build industry-wide, we’ve got to wait for a report-back from our national negotiators’.”[81] The anti-Industrial Council campaign attracted thousands of workers into the union but over time the union had to shift workers’ vision from resistance, to an understanding of the power that national negotiations on the Council had to affect changes in the industry as a whole, including unorganised workers. As Marie has indicated this took time and patience. Here Alistair Smith talks about the difficulty of shifting members’ tactics,

> There was absolute confusion!... Nobody really knew except Bernie [Fanaroff] and a couple of other people who were in the industrial council forum. We developed a sort of standard routine with every newcomer ... we didn’t recruit workers anymore, they were just flooding the union offices on a daily basis. And as workers walked into the offices, we started telling them what the union was all about, and we then started drawing charts with the industrial council, just to get through this confusion about the industrial council...
>
> We were avoiding recognition agreements. The strategy was to develop our strength in the industrial council. So we needed to grow links between the shopfloor and what was happening at the industrial council. And we tried to convince workers that they were able to control the outcomes in Industrial Council negotiations. And we made the Living Wage Campaign come alive. And we were fortunate that we had this NIC forum - it was a blessing in disguise. Because we were able to make maximum propaganda out of it because people knew there was this government increase, they just didn’t understand what the connections were... So they began to understand this.[82]

In 1984 the Mawu AGM formally committed the union to fighting for a living wage in a resolution

that was to evolve into its first, and most important co-ordinated national campaign, the Living Wage Campaign. It revolved around winning adequate wages through Council negotiations and it was to consolidate Mawu as an indisputably national union which was able to mobilise thousands of small and large workplaces nationwide around common demands. The following year the union underscored this national character by holding its first national staff meeting at the Lay Ecumenical Centre in Pietermaritzburg. The NEC also began to meet more frequently, and introduced the position of national organiser (Fanaroff was the first). At local level it formalised staff committees to ensure regular report-backs on developments in the campaign and to mobilise local structures around negotiations. As Marie outlines, "The idea was that we've got to build power, and we must be able to use this power...what was new was setting up a national bargaining campaign in a tighter way with strong involvement of local structures and national co-ordination."[83]

Mawu held shopsteward councils, factory meetings, demonstrations, and mass rallies countrywide in and around major industrial areas such as the Vaal, Witbank, Katlehong, Empangeni, Isithebe, Port Elizabeth, Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg, and Durban to formulate demands and to build the Living Wage Campaign. Here Elias Monage a Mawu shopsteward at Don Products and later a Numsa organiser recalls those days, "When we do campaigns [now] we don't put enough effort into the propaganda around it. In the old days we'd make placards, sticker, radio broadcasts, today no - just a meeting and that's all. In 1985 Mawu, the Living Wage Campaign. I remember assembling at Huntersfield in Germiston, we were about thirty-five to forty thousand. And after that rally we were about sixty to eighty-five thousand because you brought issues that linked directly with members and popularised them..."[84]

During the week-ends we would have rallies. We would go to Shareworld taking buses. There were rallies once a month linked to each round of negotiations. At that time they were financed by the IMF. All the shopstewards from every single factory would meet in the Germiston City Hall [for negotiations] which is an enormous place, and then all the parties agreed to move it so it went to Randburg. And the shopstewards weren't allowed that year so they all paid for buses, and bused to Randburg, and went in separately one by one until they filled this meeting room up. And you saw there was much more of a link between the factories and the negotiations.[85]

Moreover, the huge appeal of the living wage campaign and the development of a national workers' consciousness around this concept was deeply influenced by the mass political mobilisation that was taking place in the country from 1983 onwards. Many of the union's slogans used in its information and media campaigns were drawn from this wider political struggle when it employed terms such as `Mobilise for ...`; 'This year we fight...'; "Forward to ...` and `Workers mobilise and lead for a democratic South Africa'.[86]

Each year after the campaign surrounding negotiations a flood of workers joined the union. After the 1983 negotiations, for example, thousands of workers joined up in Pinetown, Brits, and at Highveld Steel in Witbank, one of the biggest metal factories in South Africa, membership increased from 500 to 2 300.[87] By 1985 the union had recruited strong membership in the giant Iscor and in the first six months of 1986, the union grew by 30 per cent so that its membership soared to 51 000 paid up members.[88] A local organiser in Kempton Park recalls membership from other unions flocking to join, "During the 1986 Mawu national wage campaign Seawusa (Steel, Engineering & Allied Workers Union of South Africa) members flocked to our office seeking membership to our union. They told us they have heard about the Mawu strike for better wages and would like to join other metal workers in this struggle... In most cases I got the impression that these workers no longer identified with their union."[89] Recruiting was no longer an issue. Mbanjwa notes, "The Industrial Council brought legitimacy to the union. It eased the burden of recruiting workers to a point where it was workers themselves who came to the union offices to join..."[90]

Mawu however, could not indefinitely mobilise against the Council while at the same time satisfying the interests of its members. It had to show some signs of success within it. Thus from 1985 onwards it began to build alliances with other IMF unions on the Council notably the Engineering Industrial Workers Union, the Eastern Province Border Engineering and General Workers Union, The Radio, TV, Electronics and Allied Workers Union, the Steel, Engineering & Allied Workers Union of South Africa, and the South African Boilermakers Iron and Steelworkers, Shipbuilders and Welders Society (SABS).[91] In 1984 the old craft union, SABS, had joined Mawu in its demands to the Industrial Council partly because it was a fellow IMF member and partly because it had opened its doors to African workers. This alliance did not significantly change the balance of power but it contributed to the build up of Mawu's influence on the Council and it was the beginning of a shift in power.[92] In 1985 all six IMF unions agreed to table joint demands. The employers' final offer of R1.90 per hour was rejected and Mawu refused to sign the Nicisemi agreement. Ultimately the other IMF unions signed despite the deadlock in order to ensure that the increase went to unorganised workers.[93] Mawu however, did not see this as a defeat. As Fanaroff explained, the exercise of negotiating jointly had strengthened the IMF alliance, and had begun the process of undermining the power of the CMBU block.[94]

Mawu was also achieving considerable success through changes it brought to the Council's dispute resolution procedures. The union was faced with cumbersome and lengthy procedures where, for example, in an unfair labour practice case at Precision Tools, the Nicisemi secretary told Mawu that it would take two months and thousands of rands to get the Council to sit.[95] Mawu negotiated changes to procedures making this facility a quick and effective tool to resolve disputes. By late

1983 the union had declared eleven disputes with large companies (twice it turned the machinery against the Council and triggered industrial court actions forcing employers to bargain outside of it)[96] and was setting important precedents around selective hiring and firing. As Mbanjwa recalls,

> One of the things we achieved was on the whole question of the reinstatement of workers after a strike, and the whole idea of selecting workers for re-employment. It became clear that companies cannot selectively hire and fire. If there was any hint that employers were victimising the worker because of the union then we immediately got reinstatement of the worker. And it was those struggles that popularised the idea of following legal procedures, because if you followed correct channels then employers would find themselves on the receiving end when the decision came to the Industrial Court.[97]

Power through all-level bargaining

A common gripe amongst membership was that large companies who made good profits should not get away with paying low council minima or with paying higher actual wages still benchmarked against Council minima. As Mayekiso commented, "The IC is controlled by companies like Anglo and Siemens then we will focus our living wage demands on them. Because on the IC the bosses only talk about the small guys who they say can't afford it. But we want the big guys to pay the wage workers need and they can afford it."[98] The union had to, on the one hand, ensure that members from larger, wealthier factories, who were already earning above Council minima, did not feel that their interests were being sacrificed by the move into a centralised bargaining forum where only national minima were set. Workers in these factories had to be assured of the ability to negotiate higher actual wages at factory level. On the other hand, it had to commit itself to forcing higher minima at Council level in order to increase minimum wages across the engineering industry as a whole which also covered members in smaller factories with less bargaining power, and unorganised workers with no power at all. The question was how to utilise members' power in different bargaining forums to win maximum wages and optimal conditions for all workers. The union's answer to this was to adopt a strategy of two-tier bargaining (or as it was variously known multi-tiered or all-level bargaining) in order to accommodate the needs of different workers in the industry.[99]

This twin-tracked bargaining strategy was not however one to which Seifsa easily warmed. For employers the benefit of negotiating in an Industrial Council forum was to ensure low minimum wages in the industry and to make sure that larger employers did not breach this by paying above agreed minima. Consequently Seifsa persistently exhorted its members not to negotiate wages outside of the Council as this statement of Seifsa's Sam Van Coller from Nicisemi minutes reflects, " ...it is the view of the [employer] associations, party to the agreement, that they are not in favour of formal collective bargaining at Company level on basic conditions of employment covered by these Agreements and I must make that absolutely clear."[100] Most companies adhered to this policy. Nevertheless Mawu's factory power forced a number of large employers to negotiate at factory level despite their presence at Council negotiations. Barlow Rand, for example, confronted

sustained pressure at plant level to increase wages. At WB Cameron, for example, a subsidiary in Jacobs, Durban, the union won recognition after a two year struggle. Thereafter through sustained industrial action (demonstration stoppages, and go-slows) and the threat of a legal strike, the company agreed to plant negotiations in which Mawu won a minimum wage of R90 a week which was above the Seifsa minimum wage.[101] Barlow faced further recognition and wage strikes in 1983 at Barlow Manufacturing in Kew and Barlow Fuchs in Alrode and again agreed to recognise the union and negotiate wages.[102] In consequence at a Seifsa meeting on the East Rand in the same year Barlow clashed with Scaw (an Anglo American subsidiary) and Seifsa chair, Graham Boustred, on the issue of bargaining outside the Nicisemi.[103]

The April 1985 Nicisemi negotiations opened to a Seifsa announcement that as a result of rising inflation, a low gold price, overspending by government, and high production costs it was unable to compete with metal producers in other countries. In consequence Seifsa companies were not in a position to offer any wage increases.[104] Subsequent negotiations deadlocked when employers made a final offer of 14 cents on the minimum (giving R1,90 per hour) whilst the union demanded a R3.50.minimum and an across the board increase of 50c.[105] In response Mawu advised Transvaal companies to bargain at plant level or face strike action. In September shopstewards at about 70 companies began strike ballots including those at large companies such as Dorbyl, GEC, Barlow, and Siemens. This forced a number of companies to ignore Seifsa's directive.[106] The tide was beginning to turn as cracks manifested in Seifsa's position. The simple threat of strike action induced many companies to settle at plant level as strike ballots frequently produced ninety per cent votes in favour of industrial action. Other companies experienced the consequence of not settling in the face of overwhelming ballots in favour of strike action. In July, for example, 1 200 members at five Siemens companies struck to demand an across the board increase of R1 per hour after which the company negotiated a 16 cents per hour increase (two cents above the Council rate).[107] Barlow Rand had already resigned from the Council and attempted to settle at plant level before Industrial Council negotiations to avoid strike action at its factories.[108] The fight for plant bargaining was however mostly won in Natal where, in 1984, an organiser declared that "...actions are planned against this small cancerous growth of anti-democratic employers." [109] The branch fought a group of companies through the courts to force them to bargain at company level - Hart, Wispeco, CYC Engineering, Pineware, and McKinnon Chain. In due course it won some significant wage increases, between 15-30 per cent higher than council minima, in companies such as Prestige, APV Kestner, Pillar Naco, Glacier Bearings, Forbo Krommenie, CI Industries, Instep Components and Alusaf.[110]

For Mawu, 1986 however was the watershed year. Firstly real wages and levels of employment had declined in the engineering sector contributing to rising militancy among workers. Secondly

participation in Industrial Council negotiations had increased union membership and ironically served to refocus attention on plant based negotiations. Thirdly more and more employers were beginning to doubt the wisdom of the Industrial Council's wage bargaining orthodoxy. At the Mawu July 1986 National Congress, Fanaroff pointed out that 80 000 metalworkers had lost jobs in the previous three years. He also noted that for the previous four years the Industrial Council had settled at wages 7- 8 per cent below inflation. Real wages for low paid workers had not increased since 1975 despite an increase in the profits of companies such as Anglo American of 500 per cent. Smaller companies, he conceded, were struggling in the recession, but this was not true for large companies who employed eighty-five per cent of metal workers.[111] President, Jeffrey Vilane, rounded off this preamble to Mawu's demands with the threat that "this year we are not prepared to accept scraps."[112] By 1986 the impact of the living wage campaign caused workers to become progressively impatient with the slow pace of Council negotiations and numerous plant wage disputes was the result, "There were three, or four fucking strikes every week in 1986." commented organiser Alistair Smith.[113] When Seifsa offered well below the IMF unions' R3,50 per hour living wage demand, talks deadlocked and Mawu declared a dispute. Mawu, together with the IMF Electrical and Allied Workers Union, launched a campaign to put pressure on Seifsa. The unions held a day of action on which 30 000 workers conducted factory demonstrations, which was followed by two national stoppages, and culminated in a national overtime ban.[114] Simultaneously, Mawu threatened a legal strike which, being a Council member with the largest number of paid up members, it potentially had the power to do. The campaign forced Seifsa to increase its `final` offer twice and other unions on the Council signed the agreement at R2, 24 per hour. Mawu gained credit for the increases, despite not signing, and in addition made important gains in its fight to achieve 6 months paid maternity leave. Employers agreed to grant expectant women workers job security and payment from the Council sick pay fund if they returned to work within three months. Women who returned after 6 month's maternity leave would get preference if a vacancy arose.[115]

As previously mentioned, whilst in dispute with the Nicisemi the union had forced Seifsa to twice revise its wage offer. Once the union declared a dispute, shopstewards in a number of companies threatened action unless the their companies opened plant bargaining. Several employers seized the opportunity to extricate themselves from the campaign surrounding the negotiations and the possibility of a national strike. The Nicisemi wage offer provided a benchmark from which to begin such negotiations and in consequence the union won some good increases in large companies such as Kent Meters, Siemens, Sandvik, and Robert Bosch.[116] Seifsa companies were becoming progressively divided and it was forced to concede that employers could negotiate increases over and above Council rates at plant level if they wished. Marie commented on this irony, "In the past when we were small, and not that well organised, the bosses tended to centralise

everything. Now that we have grown and the quality of our organisation has improved... bosses attempt to weaken us by refusing to bargain anywhere else but at plant level."[117]

The union too, was facing its own contradictions as its policy of all level bargaining came under strain. When it mobilised its members nationally in 1986 around an overtime ban, a number of companies, notably Barlow, began to negotiate at plant-level while Mawu and Seifsa were still negotiating on the Council. When employers on the Council made a final offer of 32 cents an hour which Mawu rejected, some members did not support the idea of a one-day stoppage because they had already settled at plant level.[118] Mawu's strategy was potentially dividing workers. As previously noted members grew impatient with lengthy Council bargaining and many turned to factory negotiations for their annual increases. Plant negotiations were also straining union resources despite a sounder financial base especially as bargaining took place at different times in the year over a wide range of factories nationally.

Despite forcing up Council wages, by 1986 the union had made limited impact on Council wage outcomes. In 1985 and 1986 the average increase on real wages for semi and unskilled workers was 7 per cent and 11 per cent respectively and this was well below the rate of inflation. In 1985 the inflation rate increase was 16 per cent and in 1986 it rose by 18 percent.[119] Mawu was still an outsider and it was facing a membership who only partially understood the potential power of this centralised bargaining forum and who was reluctant to throw its full weight behind it.

5. Building bureaucratic power

Introduction

By 1986 Mawu had forced through a number of changes on the Nicisemi but it was not able to wield sufficient power to win substantial wage increases for metal workers. It was only when the union merged into Numsa that significant changes took place. Marie remembers, "When we moved into Numsa we adopted a different strategy to the NIC with the notion that this is a complex negotiation and you can't treat it like plant level. In Mawu we were not playing the NIC straight - we were going there and walking out."[120]

Why did the emergence of Numsa allow for the adoption of a different strategy, and what enabled this larger structure to employ new ways of building power on the Council? To answer this question it is necessary to explore why the merger allowed Numsa to wield much greater power than its separate parts had been able to exert, and in addition to examine how the restructuring of

Numsa after the 1987 merger facilitated the building of a more efficient union which enabled it to build power in the industry in more complex ways. In essence this was the building of bureaucratic power that opponents of the Industrial Council strategy had warned would render the emerging unions weak and unaccountable. Numsa, however, would turn this critique on its head and build a bureaucracy that enabled it to wield power on an national industry wide level and to move away from its fragmented plant bargaining of old.

Restructuring the union

In 1987, Micwu, Naawu, and Mawu merged to form, by South African standards, a giant union which incorporated 130 000 paid up members and constituted Cosatu's second largest affiliate. The backbone of Numsa was Mawu's 70 000 membership whilst Micwu brought in the second largest number of workers of 40 000 members. The third largest union to merge into Numsa was Naawu, which contributed 23 977 members.

Everyone was in agreement that to build power in the metal sector the new union needed to improve efficiencies at every level of organisation. This entailed firstly strengthening organisation, at the point of production, by ensuring widespread and effective training of shopstewards and worker office bearers to consolidate factory power. This also involved more thorough and appropriate training for organisers who together with shopstewards were operating at the coal face. Secondly, improving the union's efficacy involved strengthening it at the secondary level of organisation through the employment and training of a layer of support staff in areas of administration, education, legal, research, media and information. At both primary and secondary levels of organisation the union turned its attention to improving staff working conditions as a way of both retaining more skilled staff and of increasing staff morale in an hectic and stressful environment.[121]

The new union modelled its organisational structures mainly on those developed in Naawu and Mawu which were underpinned by the principles of workers' control and democracy. It refined and extended these more limited organisational structures to accommodate larger numbers and allow for increased efficiencies. Both Naawu and Micwu in their different ways provided models of organisation that ran effective administrative and financial systems including satisfactory staff working conditions, and a degree of specialisation and division of labour. Thus whilst all the unions brought something of value to the new organisation, none of them on their own provided a ready-made model for Numsa to adopt. It was Mawu, however, that in many ways gained the most from the new super union although each union registered gains as well as losses in this merger. Partly because of its greater numbers (70 000 in 1987), the rapidity with which it had grown, and high levels of industrial action, Mawu was always in danger of extending beyond its capacity to

service membership. This was not helped by its weak administrative and financial systems. A restructured union which placed an emphasis on efficient services was what it most needed. There were other factors too that had the potential greatly to strengthen the capacity of all the former unions. Such factors as the infrastructure to run large campaigns, the power that came with increased numbers, the ability to call on solidarity action across sectors, and the increase in resources and personnel also improved on the ability to service, and represent, membership.

These unions, by uniting to form Numsa, created a large, complex, national organisation where a specialisation of functions on all levels was possible. On a national level, it set up three separate departments to co-ordinate organising, and bargaining, in different sectors. The Auto/Tyre/Motor Department, the Engineering Department, and the Administration Department. It took care to integrate and spread the skills and experience of the leadership of its component unions. As former president Daniel Dube here explains,

> ... because of the size of the organisation, there were two vice presidents. Then you had the General Secretary. And then you had Industrial Secretaries. Because Fred Sauls had the experience as Naawu General Secretary in the auto industry, we made him head of our auto section. And Bernie Fanaroff knew the metal industry - he had negotiated with Seifsa for many years, and we made him the head of that section. And we made Des East the head of administration. All of these sat at each national executive sitting. We were trying to amalgamate the administrations of the former unions, where all of them were general secretaries. You couldn't exclude them as a result. Number two, we needed to understand the conditions in these different industries. Again, you can't leave out these guys, because they were the captains in their unions, and they had a wealth of information.[122]

Each department was led by a national secretary and a national organiser, whilst Fanaroff co-ordinated an overarching collective bargaining structure. The three departmental secretaries shared General Secretary, Moses Mayekiso's duties while he was in prison from 1987 - 1989 although in practice the administrative secretary, East, carried out many of these functions. Peter Dantjies later became acting General Secretary.[123] The role of the General Secretary, which in Mawu had centred chiefly on an organising, mobilising, political leadership, assumed in Numsa increasingly a managerial character. As Dantjies comments, "Admin in the past [in Mawu] was a neglected area - the issue was to organise workers and have strong union structures and engage on wages and conditions of employment."[124] Much of this administrative input was drawn from Micwu which came from a Tucsa tradition of sound administration and strong financial systems. As Ekki Esau explains "In most instances we took over the Micwu offices which were well-organised and we introduced systems because nobody knew what membership we had. To start a huge union like that, if you didn't try and set up good administration it would have been a disaster."[125] Initially the head office of the Engineering sector was in Johannesburg, and the head office for Auto/Tyre/Motor was in Port Elizabeth, but by 1989 the head offices were integrated into one national headquarter in Johannesburg, "Now you had to bring all of that under one roof. You had

to make sure that the officials from the ex-unions were not continuing with their union battles within this new body." commented Dube.[126]

It was immediately apparent that control over Numsa's financial resources was critical as subscriptions from its 130 000 paid up membership came pouring in. Mawu could offer little in this arena, as Kosi Matlala, an administrator from the former Mawu, recalled,

> In Mawu we had a centralised system of subs whereby companies would send to head office. That was chaotic because we didn't know how many members and companies we had... and whether companies were deducting money but not sending it to head office. There was no way we could keep track... we just used to estimate figures and end up paying Cosatu big affiliation fees without knowing really what your membership was. We just didn't have the manpower to update our records for every company.[127]

Micwu most usefully contributed in these areas ironically because it had never strongly embraced democratic principles of workers' control. Esau explains,

> It [Micwu] wasn't like in Mawu where a very good shopsteward, a fantastic leader on the shopfloor, was dismissed and then employed by the union as an organiser. The moment you took that shopsteward out of the factory and put him in the office, he didn't know what to do. The guy was out of his depth - the result was that the office was chaos. Mawu had a system of workers' control where people felt nobody must be a boss in the office. You had an office where everybody is exactly the same, the regional secretary was the same as the organiser. Any member can walk in and pick up the phone. The only reason they survived was because of outside funding. There was absolutely no discipline in the office - people could just walk in and do as they pleased as it was their union. Definitely it is the members' office and they paid for it through their subs, but you need to put someone in charge and that person is responsible for that office.[128]

Former Micwu administrative secretary, Jenny Isaacs, used her experience to set up financial systems, but had to adapt this knowledge to accommodate the issue of workers' control in the Naawu/Mawu tradition, "There were committees in Micwu but no direct links with the workers as in Numsa now. The administration was just like the commercial world in Micwu days."[129] Micwu brought a million rand into Numsa which was vital in carrying the new union in the early months before income started flowing in. Des East recalls Micwu's trepidation, "There was a lot of tension from our members after the merger. Members felt that we were `leading them into hell`, and `using our money to pay off Mawu debts`. We saw our accumulated assets going one way. There didn't seem to be any proper management over money."[130] The union's aim was to become financially viable and self-sufficient. Over time its main source of income was generated from membership subscriptions which had formerly been the case in Naawu and Micwu, but not as completely with Mawu which had frequently depended on overseas donations to sustain itself. Numsa continued to receive financial assistance from the IMF but this was in the main for legal and educational activities. Finances were centralised nationally and annual regional and national budgets were drawn up. In 1988 a National Finance Committee (NFC) consisting of worker representatives was established to oversee budgets, monitor expenses, and to assess audit reports.

It reported directly to the Central Committee which ensured that spending was consonant with what the worker controlled national congress had decided.[131]

Despite large amounts of money flowing into the union, and the presence of careful financial accounting, Numsa just broke even. The General Secretary's report to Numsa's May 1989 National Congress, for example, stated: "For the period January 1988 to December 1988 the union's income was R 8 699 623 - expenses including regions is R7 278 519. The surplus on operations is R 1 421 104." By 1991 Numsa's income was R17.6 million and its expenditure R17.2.[132] By 1993 income came to R2.1 million and expenditure R 2.2 million - 53 per cent of finances covered salaries and benefits, R1.1 million, and R140,000 went to rent.[133] The General Secretary bemoaned Numsa's weak financial position. According to Isaacs part of the problem was getting Numsa regions to keep proper financial records which did not transpire because "We haven't done proper training on finances."[134]

Some of Numsa's money problems however were beyond its control. In 1989 a member of the security police, Michael Bellingan, opened a bank account under the name of Nicholas Umsa (N. Umsa). With the assistance of the post office he availed himself of Numsa cheques from the union's mail box and deposited them into his N. Umsa account. This continued over a number of years as the union did not possess sufficiently sophisticated financial systems to locate the loss of this money. Eventually, an overseas donor queried the arrival of a cheque it had deposited into Numsa's account of R350 000. Simultaneously, Bellingan's wife, Janine, discovered his deceit and when she threatened to inform Numsa he battered her to death. Police found a bag addressed to Numsa containing information about the union's cheques in Janine Bellingan's locker at work soon after she was killed in 1991. Michael Bellingan later received 22 years imprisonment for her murder. Numsa was never able to uncover an accurate record of how much money was lost to the union but it was estimated at over R2 million.[135]

A later change in Numsa's subscriptions system whereby a flat rate was altered to a system of percentage deductions based on a worker's gross income, which as Isaacs explained "...avoided us going back to the members to ask for an increase. When they got an increase so automatically we got that increase."[136] ensured that Numsa did not again accumulate a deficit. Despite, financial difficulties, the union's greatly augmented income was able to support a substantial growth in local, regional, and national activities, and it put in place financial controls whereby requests for increased finances could be carefully assessed before allocation. Matlala recalls this change in financial practice,

> In Mawu most of the time we had a deficit - we never had a surplus. We never put any money aside... the money just came in and went out. A strong branch would come to the NEC - it was not on the basis of this office has so many members, so many staff , so much

> equipment, this is what is required. Strong branches would just come and argue and argue until they got something of what they wanted. Now, in Numsa, head office will work out some figures when regions ask for an increase in order to help guide the central committee to make a decision - if we give you so much increase this is the implication.[137]

The union's improved finances allowed it to create specialist posts. Formerly, especially in Mawu, staff performed a multitude of tasks and had little opportunity to focus on particular problem areas. Here Matlala describes her multiplicity of roles after re-establishing Mawu head office following the split in the union in 1984,

> We were in Harrister House in Jo'burg and it was just a big hall. And I had to start afresh - everything - setting up systems, finances were in tatters also, there were no financial systems. I had some experience from NUTW [Fosatu Textile Union]. I set up everything. I went to the bank to set up salaries, UIF, and filing systems. Later we put up partitions to try and make an office environment, and a place to work in. We were two administrators, myself and Pinkie and the organising secretary, Bernie Fanaroff, and the general secretary. That was head office. There were partitions that didn't reach the roof so I used to talk to Bernie over the partition. Pinkie was doing reception and also other admin work. I was busy doing the finances. Preparing statements for the NEC, writing up the books, writing minutes for all the national meetings. And then I would visit the branches to make sure that they were implementing systems.[138]

In Numsa specialisation resulted in departments employing more staff and by 1990 the union had 238 staff members.[139] This division of labour in turn developed into new departments. In finances, for example, over time, separate membership, finance, administration, travel and computer departments emerged which according to Isaacs, "... made the union more efficient because if you have too much work you get inefficient or you concentrate on one area which I did - on finance, so the administration and membership suffered."[140] The union employed a national legal officer, working initially in administration and later in collective bargaining. Subsequently an education, publications and media department emerged over which Alec Erwin was appointed National Education Secretary, assisted by an education administrator and a research officer. After the formation of Numsa in 1987 the former unions moved out of their old head offices into *Cosatu House* and created a large well-designed head office, according to Matlala, "The whole floor was divided into organising; the legal department; a typing pool and we also had computers by then. We had a reception area, and the GS's office - although at the time Moss was in jail. It was really improving from the situation we were in Harrister House."[141] This process of streamlining, as Matlala mentions, was further assisted by the introduction of new technology. Mawu, for example, started out in *Harrister House* as Matlala describes, "...with an old typewriter. Then we approached Xerotech to show us what we could get in golfball typewriters... Later we got a photostat machine. We used a telex machine and then later we applied for the teletex from the post office."[142] In 1989 Numsa introduced fax machines and computer technology which according to Matlala "... changed things because you get information more quickly to the regions, and computers help you store vast amounts of information, and this saves time filing. There's a big

difference from the old days."[143]

In addition, the union embarked on a process of strengthening organisation at a local and regional level which paralleled changes that were taking place at national head office level. An important part of this process was unifying organisation in the regions and it was here that strong worker leadership in the Mawu and Naawu tradition came to the fore. As Dube commented, "The office bearers, like the presidents, in those days, we were more of a unifying factor in the organisation..."[144] Office bearers visited regions to meet staff, worker leadership, and membership, to discuss problems and as Dube explained `to make sure that the people feel that this is their home."[145] They addressed problems in particular regions such as in the Eastern Cape where former Macwusa members now attended Numsa locals and there were often tensions, ("Shopstewards from different companies were forming blocks." observed a Numsa Eastern Cape member[146]) and ensured that such disputes did not deepen to a point where they could threaten the unity of the new union. It was this attention to detail that strengthened organisation and ensured that the union was built on a solid base of worker unity across regions.

In order to boost efficiency, the union further sub-divided the number of regions as membership had become too large for effective administration and co-ordination and smaller units were necessary. In early 1987 immediately prior to the merger, Mawu for example, had 70 000 members divided into three branches - Transvaal, Natal, and Western Cape. Numsa now created eleven regions (later to become nine) namely KwaZulu Natal; Eastern Cape; Western Cape; Northern Cape; and five regions in the Transvaal - East Rand, West Rand, Western Transvaal, Northern Transvaal, and Eastern Transvaal. In order to raise organisational capacity, regions opened new offices and employed more organisers and support staff including a regional secretary, regional organisers, administrators, and full-time educators in four of its regions. Analogous to the national General Secretary, the regional secretaries' role became a more focussed managerial one entailing greater responsibilities. They performed the functions of Mawu's former branch secretaries which involved dealing with administration and reporting to the NEC, but in addition they now had to manage staff, finances, liaise with Cosatu Regional structures, and take policy decisions on a regional level. This Dantjies observed, gave regions , "... more autonomy than in the past - the region has its own structures to take policy positions at the level of the regional congress unlike in the past."[147]

Mirroring head office, the regions now boasted a more complex organisational structure, clear divisions of labour and precise job descriptions. The Mawu days of a branch administrator performing a range of different tasks such as typing, benefits, membership, reception, and financial statements whilst the branch secretary, as Matlala remarked, "was more interested in what was

going on outside... In the past one person had to deal with everything and all the pressure. I got sick because of the way I worked."[148], were over. Now a more healthy environment developed where a range of different people now carried out these tasks and they dealt with an equivalent department in head office, unlike the single national administrator they dealt with formerly. Across the union, professionalisation and clear job descriptions for staff members started to emerge. As Matlala describes, "...in Numsa we do have clear job descriptions but before we all helped each other. If Pinkie was busy with that, I'll just do this. There were no job descriptions. If she was busy I would do the bookings..."[149] Formal staff training programmes were initiated. As Matlala continues, "There was not training in the past like it is now for our staff members. You just came into the union and worked. My advantage was that I was in contact with so many people who really helped me... I learnt a lot of things on the job but there was no training."[150]

The role of organiser also changed. In the early 1980s, the branch consisted of a secretary and general organiser who organised over a wide undemarcated area. This however, shifted when in 1984 Mawu began employing local organisers as it recognised that it was no longer possible for one general organiser to cover the growing number of factories and members. Again in 1985, the union responded to shifting organisational needs after entering the national industrial council, and it began to employ national organisers. In Numsa, organising roles underwent further transformation as it employed regional organisers whose role was to assist local organisers with difficult factories and negotiations. In the process, the role of the local organiser underwent considerable transformation, as Dantjies here recounts,

> Functions are more defined than in the past. As a local organiser, I did everything, and today the local organiser is confined to his local, and then there is a regional team doing co-ordination of the region. When I was in the Pretoria local (this local included Brits) as a local organiser I dealt with organising matters, admin matters, finance and collection of hand subs. But today as a local organiser you're not involved in subs - you get monthly reports through financial statements. Now you have a person at regional level dealing with legal matters and dealing with education. Moss was also a local organiser but then the whole East Rand and West Rand was one local! It was such a big thing, unlike today with small locals like in Pretoria alone there is Rosslyn, Pretoria, Kangala, Hammanskraal, Brits are all different locals.[151]

The restructuring of Numsa marked the end of simple organisation typified by Mawu, Micwu, and Naawu, with their limited membership and their general secretaries assisted by an administrator in head office and their organisers in the field. Numsa was a union of scale and its restructuring, supported by increased resources, created an organisation that could more readily support its primary function of collective bargaining on both national and local levels. Its national secretaries could now focus on strategic decisions around collective bargaining supported by a research, education, media, and legal team, whilst local and regional organisers implemented policy on the ground and focussed on direct servicing of membership supported by a layer of administrative

staff. The union was now in a position to assert its power and take on employers in the industry in a way that was not possible in the past. The successful integration of the different merged organisations was critical in lending the union this bureaucratic power, the accomplishment of which Dube recalls with considerable satisfaction,

> It wasn't an easy task...Numsa succeeded in creating one organisation out of those different traditions, and we have been successful in creating a new tradition for ourselves ... The union today is one. Those former captains of the former unions - that's history!... today's general secretary must be concentrating on different issues and is responsible for a much more united organisation, a much stronger organisation than the case was the other day... When I left Numsa after four years of presidency, I felt that at least that part has been achieved.[152]

The financial support that Micwu brought to Numsa, and the administrative efficiencies of both Micwu and Naawu, had created an environment that could support what Naawu and Mawu knew how to do best. As former Micwu's Esau observed, "We learnt from Numsa the organising skills. Mawu had the skills to deal with big concentrations of members. At the end of the day everybody came in with something and we all learnt from each other. Personally, I would never have learnt and gained the experience I have now if I had not gone into Numsa. Naawu and Mawu had fantastic trade unionists and very good leadership - Fred Sauls, Les Kettledas, Bernie Fanaroff and so on."[153]

6. Building power on the Nicisemi 1987 - 1988

Introduction

In 1987 Numsa took over Nicisemi negotiations from where Mawu had left off. It was a period of unprecedented strike activity in the labour movement and Numsa was no exception. From 1987 - 1989 a short-lived economic recovery in the manufacturing sector, albeit off a low base, contributed to the ignition of widespread worker action. In addition, the country remained in the grip of a national State of Emergency. Community organisation, including the militant struggles of UDF affiliates, had been crushed through the banning of meetings, widespread detentions, restrictions on individuals, night curfews which rendered township meetings impossible; and an increasingly active presence of police and military in townships which systematically crushed organisation through intimidation and arrests. Into this vacuum, Cosatu had emerged as the mass organisation of political opposition.

In response, the state turned its attention to the increasingly militant trade union movement and launched a series of attacks on it which further inflamed workers' fighting spirit. *Cosatu House* was bombed, burnings and bombings of trade union offices became more common, striking

Sarwhu (SA Railway & Harbour Workers Union) workers were shot on the street, the Labour Relations Amendment Bill was tabled which aimed to severely restrict trade union activity, and in February 1988 Cosatu was restricted from engagement with any form of political activity. Workers were aroused to take on the state and employers and the 1987 Nicisemi negotiations epitomised this spirit and this trend. Armed with a larger more resourced union, and informed by the Living Wage Campaign, Numsa membership mobilised around these national negotiations.

Nicisemi 1987 - a thwarted strike

In 1987 Numsa again presented a united front, and common demands, along with other IMF unions on the Council. Negotiations opened with the employers and unions addressing speeches at one another as 300 union supporters looked on, including the shopsteward chair from every former Mawu engineering plant.[cliv] The union pointed out through graphics and verbal argument that large companies which dominated the metal industry and employed most of the workers such as Altron, Dorbyl, Robor and Amic were making excellent profits, well over the inflation rate. Amic assets it highlighted, had increased by 1 100 per cent in 10 years, and of the 144 companies which reported their profits in February 1987 the average rise was over thirty per cent.[clv] One of the graphics presented the following information:

Year	**Profits**		**Minimum wage per hour**
	Dorbyl	Robor	
1985	R19 500 000	R10 000 000	R1,90
1986	R51 400 000	R20 000 000	R2,22
% increase	264%	100%	16,8%

* *Mawu Fighting for a Living Wage* (1987)

These companies the union argued, had made large profits through restructuring their operations - new machines, new ways of working, and retrenchment of workers. Numerous smaller factories had been forced to close down which resulted in more than 110,000 jobs being lost in the metal industry since 1982[156]. Many of these smaller companies were bought out by larger metal firms together with their machinery and orders. Finally, the union asserted, the Household Subsistence Level wage (which the union rejected as inadequate for workers' needs[157]) stood at R 425, 20 per month while the minimum wage in the metal industry was fixed at R 399,90 per month.[158] In consequence they were putting forward a demand for a living wage of R4 an hour.

Numsa's other demands echoed those of previous years. They included a 40 hour week because, as the union argued, workers' travelled an average of 4 hours a day because of apartheid planning,

worked a 9 hour day, slept 7 hours and had a meagre 4 hours left to cater for domestic chores and leisure. Further demands covered the right to strike without dismissal (since Numsa argued that the LRA and industrial court did not protect workers against dismissal), basic union rights such as access and recognition of shopstewards in order to curtail long time-wasting recognition negotiations; six months paid maternity leave, March 21, June 16 and May 1 as paid public holidays, and an end to tax deductions on low-paid black workers who objected to their earnings contributing to government spending on apartheid.[159]

Seifsa immediately rejected most demands but the union achieved a major breakthrough when employers agreed to six months maternity leave for women without job loss or loss of status on return to work. This was accompanied by a part payment from the Council sick pay fund, which combined with UIF (Unemployment Insurance Fund) payments, allowed women to recoup 95 per cent of their minimum wage for a three month period. [160] This was an increase of three months leave on the agreement that Mawu had signed on the Council in 1986. What was striking about the agreement was that most Numsa members were men although women constituted 10 per cent of membership and it covered additional unorganised women in the industry. By 1989 there were 22 000 women members in Numsa and the Council agreement covered 34 000 women across the industry.[161] It was a significant victory which demonstrated the logic of the union's entry into the Industrial Council with its ability to cover both organised and unorganised workers many of whom laboured in small workplaces where the prospects of a negotiated plant-level maternity agreement was negligible.

This victory was no accident and resulted from long years of focussed research and mobilisation in this area. It was an achievement with a history reaching back to the early eighties. Many working women feared pregnancy because it led to dismissal, "It was very very bad before. We were scared to have babies because they used to dismiss us."[162] remembered a metal worker. Anna Mhlongo, a shopsteward in an electronics company, also recalled that after they won the battle for job security the issue of status still remained, " I used to earn R3,50 as a machine operator. But when I returned from my confinement, management said my job was gone. They offered to take me back as a general worker at R2,50. They were surprised when I complained, and told me I should be grateful I was getting my job back."[163] Women frequently bound their stomachs with cloth in an attempt to hide their pregnancies, and then took a few days 'sick-leave' to give birth. Some lost the child in this way whilst others risked death or sterility in illegal terminations. Both Naawu and Mawu as progressive formations held women's issues as important and Naawu was often at the forefront of making, and winning, demands around women's rights in the early eighties. Mawu too, fought some hard battles around maternity leave in individual companies. Dorothy Mokgalo, a Numsa Nedcom chair and Cosatu's first gender co-ordinator, spoke of

struggles at National Bolts,

> The conditions were bad like with maternity leave. Before we joined the union it was as in the Basic Conditions of Employment - three months unpaid, or paid through UIF. Through negotiations we achieved more. We got six months paid - 45 per cent from UIF and the company topped up the rest. We started by negotiating at branch level, then we decided we should have a national shopsteward council for the whole company, and we achieved this with reps from all outlets in about `87, and we pushed to bargain nationally at the same time. Maternity demands were amongst the Mawu demands, and it was one of the core Cosatu Living Wage demands so it went on the issues for bargaining, including the demand for childcare.[164]

Numsa's victory on the Industrial Council in 1987 came in the wake of a sustained Mawu campaign around maternity rights in 1986. The union distributed pamphlets to factories explaining its position on maternity leave and held nationwide discussions in factories around maternity demands. There were two Transvaal shop-stewards councils alone devoted to this issue. The union ensured that the demands were strongly supported by the IMF unions on the Council whilst membership on the ground put considerable pressure on employers in plant level negotiations to concede maternity rights.[165]

The issue of wages was more fraught. Seifsa offered a 39c per hour increase on the minimum which Mawu (negotiations on the Council began when the engineering sector was in Mawu and terminated in Numsa) claimed was below the cost of living. Together with other IMF unions it declared a dispute and threatened employers with a damaging national strike. It then proceeded to embark on a campaign to educate workers on the issues, producing a booklet *Mawu Fighting for a Living Wage* which carefully explained the background to all demands. At local, regional, and national levels, committees were elected to organise and co-ordinate the campaign and through these structures it rapidly mobilised more than 50 000 workers, including hundreds of non-members, in about 630 factories through a strike ballot where 94,8 per cent voted for strike action. It also took care to follow legal strike procedures outlined in the LRA to provide some protection against dismissals.[166]

On 14 July 1987, 60 000 Numsa members struck in 652 factories nationally.[167] Prior to the strike, fifteen other unions, including all CMBU affiliates, had accepted Seifsa's wage offer and signed an agreement. This gave the Minister of Manpower an opening, in an unprecedented step, to intervene directly in Nicisemi negotiations. Agreements reached by the Industrial Council could be invested with the force of the law if the minister of labour agreed to publish the signed agreement in the Government Gazette. Thereafter transgressions of the agreement by any party became a criminal offence enforceable under the Labour Relations Act and no further industrial action was permissible on agreed clauses. Thus the Minister, Pietie du Plessis, extended the previous year's agreement, as he did not have sufficient time to gazette the new agreement, a day before the strike

was scheduled to begin. This made the strike illegal. Thereafter he gazetted the new signed agreement on 20 July. The union was forced to call off the action, leaving an angry Numsa to complain about the minister interfering "to protect the employers given the fact that this would be the first biggest strike in the metal industry."[168] The union did not have sufficient time to warn workers and thus most struck for one day. Employers revelled in Numsa's defeat. Seifsa members welcomed the intervention, Barlow factories threatened to sue the union for damages if members continued the strike, whilst other employers spoke of calling in the police and withdrawing recognition agreements with the union. Publically Seifsa employers protested that they had in no way put pressure on the Minister to intervene. The union was more sceptical.[169] Hyman has pointed out that Marxist theoreticians have long noted that state power in a capitalist society derives from the assumption that capitalist interests and 'the national interest' are considered one. While this may oversimplify the relationship, it is clear that any government operating in a capitalist society must encourage profits as its financial base through taxation is dependent on such. This, Hyman argues determines governments' attitude to strikes. Strikes are a challenge to managerial interests, and thus represent a threat to the economy. All through history governments have played a role in defeating strikes. At times by the invocation of the coercive power of the state, and at others through the naked use of violence.[170] Thus it is likely that even if there had been no direct formal consultation between the state and Seifsa, there may have been informal individual approaches or at the very least a tacit understanding that a strike of this scale in a central sector of the economy would harm both capital and the state. What was also evident was that Seifsa employers did not protest against the government's outrageous interference into what was essentially a private set of negotiations between labour and employers.

What did this defeat mean for the union's attempts to wield power in the industry? The union's response was mixed despite its public utterances. Negotiations were taking place in a highly charged political environment. Numsa had the power of numbers but it did not have the political power which at this point was firmly in the hands of the Nationalist Party who was focussed on destroying internal opposition which the Cosatu unions had come to represent. The union however did not view the outcome entirely as a defeat. Firstly, it observed with great interest that the union was able to pull out nearly 60 000 members on the one day before word of the minister's action was communicated to workers. Secondly, the union used the minister's intervention to make, as Alistair Smith put it, "...maximum publicity out of it.", whilst privately union officials, "were all quite relieved!" because of the risk of mass dismissals in a recessionary climate.[171] It had always been Mawu/Numsa's aim to expose the corrupt dealings on the Council and interventions such as these from the minister assisted in this task, "People were starting to read for the first time how it worked. Mawu, and later Numsa, walked out there and exposed what is happening, how those unions co-operate with employers. It helped not just Mawu members but also the public to

know what is going on in the IC." commented Vilane.[172]

Thirdly, mass mobilisation had consolidated and strengthened structures and worker discipline whilst membership soared. Ex-Naawu factories in Johannesburg and ex-Macwusa factories in the Eastern Cape which fell under Seifsa, for example, had participated in the short strike. Hundreds of non-members voted in the strike ballot, and two local councils reported 40 new factories joining as a result of the pre-strike campaign.[173] The aborted strike raised unorganised metal workers' awareness of a union that was prepared to take radical action in its fight for adequate wages. Thousands of workers from unions which had accepted Seifsa's wage offer crossed the floor to join Numsa attracted by its stated aim of becoming the largest union in the metal industry, and disappointed by their own unions' inability to respond to membership pressure to adopt a more militant stance. Where the Council negotiated House Agreements (see below) Numsa attempted to conduct strike ballots and strikes at the same time as the ballots around the Council Main Agreement. In these companies too, the union witnessed a massive increase in membership. At Iscor, for example, where 7 000 workers came out on strike in August, the union gained 1000 new members a day immediately prior to the strike ballot.[174] Regional Secretary, Lucky Molefe, also commented on workers' disciplined approach to the strike in a situation where they were fired up to take action, " ...calling off the strike posed problems in some factories ... but most members stopped after one day."[175]

Finally, despite their satisfaction at the minister's action, employers soon felt the force of workers' anger. Many workers turned their militant energy on individual employers and demanded plant level wage increases, and many well-organised factories made significant gains, certainly higher than the Nicisemi increase. At Expanda Products, for example, workers won a 60 cents an hour wage hike.[176] Numsa recognised the benefits of this for future Nicisemi negotiations. As an internal document explained, "Limited. supplementary bargaining at plant level has the effect of raising the general level of actual wages, and so it significantly reduces managements' resistance to higher minima in the next year's bargaining at national level."[177]

Nicisemi 1988 - Numsa seizes power

Introduction

Successful plant level bargaining had its advantages in pushing wages over Nicisemi levels, but, as the union acknowledged, "This is a very mixed blessing."[178] The benefits of centralised bargaining still outweighed the benefits of bargaining at individual plant or company level. By October 1988 more than 9 000 companies operated in the engineering industry, and 10 000 plants functioned in the Transvaal alone, where about 351 000 production workers were employed on hourly pay.[179] There was no possibility of the union plant bargaining for each of these units. Besides, Seifsa

employers on the Council who represented about 39 per cent of employers in the industry, employed over 70 per cent per cent of the industry workforce.[180] Furthermore, plant bargaining usually involved a quid pro quo especially as managements became more sophisticated in their labour relations strategies. Often the union had to concede on productivity increases or on some form of greater labour flexibility to the benefit of the employer.[181]

As the 1988 Nicisemi negotiations opened the union persisted more determinedly than ever in its battle for hegemony on the engineering Industrial Council. It was determined to break Seifsa's cosy relationship with other unions, believing that they would do significantly better " ...if the CMBU and other IMF unions did not always give Seifsa a way out, and Seifsa had to bargain only with Numsa until exhaustion"[182] Furthermore, the union knew that it had brought a militant membership to the limits of its tolerance in respect of the union's industrial council strategy and this was the year where some manner of resolution had to occur. The union went into negotiations in the knowledge that, "Our members have become more and more frustrated with the premature ending of bargaining every year... There was very significant scepticism, especially amongst ex-Mawu members in the Transvaal, about the determination of Numsa to push for real gains"[183]

Gone were the days when the union was reacting on the spur of the moment to militant worker action. The union was geared up to confront employers and long before actual negotiations it was educating and mobilising workers on the issues. According to Smith, "It was a very conscious strategy to say `Look, we're not getting any joy from centralised bargaining. We've been at it now for almost five years, we've just been fobbed off, we've been besieged, we've been lied to, and we're quite frankly losing credibility. The shop floor members no longer trust us anymore. We're not getting anything out of this, so we're gonna hit you. We're gonna hit you where it hurts."[184] In March of that year Numsa had formally developed a union campaign structure. Numsa was the first union to recognise the need for dedicated resources to focus on the conduct of campaigns both in its own ranks and in Cosatu. In 1988, for example, it was involved in 'The Release Mayekiso Campaign', the anti-LRA Campaign, and the Living Wage Campaign. Previously, constitutional structures had adopted campaigns but because of a lack of dedicated resources such campaigns would be lost in vast amounts of day to day business. The union hoped by creating dedicated campaign structures to co-ordinate and monitor different campaigns, it would be able to mobilise workers to understand, and participate more effectively in them. It now engaged in the election of office bearers in local, regional, and national campaign structures which operated parallel to Numsa's existent structures. About five to ten shopstewards from all industrial sectors of the union (auto, motor and engineering) and an organiser constituted a Local Campaigns Committee (LCC). This in turn elected five shopstewards to the Regional Campaign Committee (RCC), The RCC then elected two shopstewards to the National Campaign Committee (NCC) together with a

representative from each bargaining sector, national women's structures, and large shop steward councils such as Metal Box. The NCC co-ordinated all campaigns that the Central Committee (CC) had decided upon, and reported back to this body. It was an executive structure which had considerable resources allocated to it which it used to produce pamphlets, posters, stickers, newsletters and other media for campaigns. In addition it was responsible for ensuring detailed and regular report-backs to regions, locals, and factories.[185]

Build up to industry-wide strike

The 1988 Nicisemi negotiations unfolded in the context of a continued attack by the government on most forces of political opposition and on the labour movement. In February, the government banned 17 organisations including the UDF and restricted Cosatu from participating in political activities. From June 6-8 a stayaway involving 3 million workers took place to protest amendments to the LRA and the political restrictions. On the Witwatersrand alone 84 per cent[186] of metal workers stayed at home. In August, to Cosatu's anger, the state announced the passage through parliament of the Labour Relations Amendment Act.[187] For Numsa 1988 was a year of strikes - 43 per cent of all strike days in South Africa[188], many of them around wages, were Numsa's. Such figures make nonsense of a Seifsa claim that in the 1980s, "Seifsa provided a stable environment in which the industry would experience `phenomenal growth` . Thanks to a Main Agreement on employment conditions that was `a remarkable instrument`, the time lost to the industry through work stoppages had been minimal."[189] Employers were bludgeoned by both small and large strikes. At Siemens, for example, six plants struck over the company's refusal to negotiate retrenchment and in the homelands, where companies were not covered by the LRA or Nicisemi minimum wages and conditions, a spate of quick strikes took place. Most strikes were illegal and many employers responded with ferocity as they handed out final disciplinary warnings and interdicted the union wherever possible for unlawful actions. In the homelands striking workers were often dismissed without reinstatement. There employers seldom recognised Numsa or granted wage increases although from time to time the union would make a breakthrough. In Kwasithebe, for example, the union raised wages to close to Nicisemi rates in most factories.[190]

It was in this embattled context that Numsa approached the 1988 Nicisemi negotiations. The union again forged an alliance with the IMF unions (Eawtusa, Seawu, and Eawu) [191] on the Council in order to conduct a joint campaign in the approach to Council negotiations. The aim of the joint campaign, accompanied by mass rallies, was to formulate and popularise demands to put forward at negotiations. By so doing Numsa hoped to prevent other unions in the alliance from settling on demands which were unpopular with workers and which would be the death of its Living Wage Campaign. Numsa also hoped to get access to other IMF unions' membership so that it could influence them directly.[192] Through this alliance Numsa posed a genuine threat to the CMBU

unions. Previously the Seifsa/CMBU alliance had marginalised Mawu/Numsa. Now the IMF alliance consisting of four metal unions representing large numbers of workers was too much of a presence in the industry to simply disregard. Employers confronted a stronger alliance than in previous years as metal workers nationwide held joint general meetings to receive mandates and to report back during negotiations. Consolidated demands included a minimum rate of R5 an hour. The CMBU unions as usual distanced themselves from the demand. In their reply to the employers' offer the CMBU's Ben Nicholson explained, "...we will support any scheme whereby the employer will confer with his employees and use them to participate in any schemes which will make the company more profitable… We see the demands of the [other] trade unions as being excessive. We,…despite a further month having gone past, have seen no attempt by the trade unions to moderate those demands"[193] For the first time, Numsa also demanded an across the board increase on actual wages of R1.50 which aimed to narrow the discriminatory apartheid wage gap between skilled, and un/semi-skilled workers. Flattening the apartheid wage curve emerged as a central demand in the 1988 negotiations. As Smith recalls, "... the key campaign there was, was around the wage differential, around the Apartheid Wage Curve. There's a very nice poster where they show you a site supervisor with his hard hat, earning so-many thousands a month, and then sort of a worker on the same site earning a hundred rand a week...".[194] The union demanded that Seifsa acknowledge the distortion in wages that their centralised bargaining had entrenched over the years and accused it of perpetuating "racial discrimination in the industry by negotiating agreements with trade unions who represent mainly White employees and that of course means the CMBU unions." Employing a graph which illustrated the racially based wage curve, Fanaroff argued that "…there is clearly a racial gap and that racial gap is a result of the parties to this Council either taking advantage of being victims of, whichever way you look at it – the result of apartheid laws…job reservation and secondly the fact that unions which Black workers were prohibited from taking part in Industrial Council negotiations."[195] Numsa demanded that the wage anomalies be rectified and proposed the formulation of a timetable in order to effect this. Seifsa negotiators prevaricated and found various excuses to delay such a process whilst vociferously denying the existence of racial discrimination in the industry. Seifsa director, and Industrial Council negotiator, Brian Angus, arguing through the use of technicalities avoided acknowledging the principle at hand ,

> ...there is no racial discrimination whatsoever in the industry's wage schedule or in any other part of the Industrial Council Agreement. There is no reference… anywhere in the Agreement to the subject of race and certainly not as this impacts on pay…The fact that the majority of employees in a particular category may happen to belong mainly to one or other particular racial group in no way implies that there is racial discrimination in our wage structures in the industry... the employers cannot commit themselves to a specific timetable in this respect and certainly not until we have a commonly agreed basis of job evaluation in this industry…Dr Fanaroff has also now stated…that Seifsa has perpetrated racial discrimination by negotiating agreements with so-called White unions, the CMBU unions, and then seeing those are extended. I must reiterate in the strongest terms that the

statement is untrue."[196]

Other demands included the previously unachieved March 21, May 1 and June 16 public holidays, retrenchment payment of one month's wages for each year of work and at least one month's notice of redundancy to allow for negotiations, 14 days paternity leave, equal job and technical training for all employees, and an increase in overtime and shift allowance rates.[197]

Seifsa's immediate response was to reject most of the demands including the IMF unions' R5 minimum wage demand and the unions' later adjustment to R3, 21 per hour. The pattern of previous years began to take shape as the IMF alliance declared a dispute and the CMBU unions accepted Seifsa's offer. The union was now determined that the big Seifsa employers should no longer hide behind the excuse that smaller employers could not pay higher minima. The issue was "come with a fair minimum wage or we hit you."[198] The next step was to mobilise for an industry-wide strike in which for the first time the other IMF unions agreed to participate. This was an event that Numsa would have scarcely believed a year earlier when Fanaroff had commented that, "We do co-operate with other IMF unions in putting demands. There is a fair amount of co-operation up to the point where we reach deadlock with management, but then the individual unions have to decide for themselves whether they are going to sign the agreement , but in particular none of the other unions have supported us in industrial action and it seems unlikely they ever will."[199]

Many metalworkers were prepared for action, especially as the unions had discussed this possibility in the three month build up to negotiations. However the strike ballot in some regions showed that not all workers were willing to come out. The climate had changed from the previous year. Many workers were alarmed by dismissals in the wake of the huge national stayaway[200] two months earlier. It was the largest and longest stayaway of workers in the history of South Africa and many employers reacted in a different manner from the usual `no work , no pay` stance on politically motivated stayaways and dismissed workers for participating. Although huge numbers were not disciplined thus, about 2 000 Cosatu members and 1 600 Nactu members were dismissed,[201] whilst Numsa suffered about 500 dismissals (130 workers from Iscor alone[202]). Thousands of dismissal warnings were also issued which seemed to have a sobering affect on workers. In addition, many members in the IMF unions voted against the strike largely because they had agreements with companies which involved plant bargaining over wages. A major problem and irony was the success and proliferation of plant based agreements. Here Numsa in a sense was the victim of its own success. Following the substantial wage increases negotiated at plant level in 1988, and a rise in the number of companies prepared to engage in plant negotiations especially in the Vaal, Natal, and Cape where almost all plants had company bargaining rights, many workers were not willing to take risks when it mainly benefited smaller, weaker, and unorganised plants. Seifsa companies had seen the danger signs after the previous year's strike

ballot and at least sixty-six Seifsa companies opened up plant level negotiations immediately after the threat of strike action was made.[203] It was these factors that rendered employers somewhat sceptical, and hence complacent, of Numsa's threats of national strike action. Numsa's frustrations on the Nicisemi expressed itself through such statements as "…after all these years on this forum we are still not really getting through to the employers. The employers are still not really listening …employers are regarding us with contempt and are going through the motions of negotiation purely because they have to do so." [204] Such statements seem to have had little impact on employers. Their flippant response was evident in such empty rhetoric as Brian Angus' "…they [employers] are becoming a bit tired of the constant remarks about the employers being perceived to be not negotiating in good faith, procrastinating, going back on promises and so on. We do not believe that this is helpful, that this is constructive in the process of these negotiations…We would earnestly request that in order to progress these negotiations further that the trade unions refrain from this kind of comment …"[205]

Moreover, in a contradictory situation worker solidarity was both strengthened and weakened by the existence of House Agreements. Workers in these companies obviously benefited from the outcomes of negotiations in the Main Agreement as they would use such minima as a departure point in their wage negotiations, and hence had a genuine interest in expressing solidarity with action taken by workers falling under the Main Agreement. Nevertheless, they were not party to negotiations around the Main Agreement and thus large numbers of militant members in big companies were excluded from action arising out of disputes declared in the main bargaining forum and excluded from participating in any strike ballot.

To accommodate the reluctance by workers in certain regions to take action, the union released a statement stating that, "IMF members decided to take strategic action primarily in the major industrial areas and some of the companies which are important in Seifsa decision-making."[206] This in effect meant the strike would take place chiefly on the Witwatersrand and was in essence a regional, rather than a national one. It also meant that the strike would take place primarily in companies where the union had put considerable organising resources into the building of National Company Councils (see following section). The union did not view the regional nature of the strike as a problem because it was still in the process of consolidating structures and a "national strike is a real trial of strength and should only be held when the organisation is really strong."[207] Nevertheless the risks were great for the union as the stakes were high on both sides. Hyman has spoken of the disadvantage of unions taking the formal route of declaring a dispute where management is forewarned of industrial action which thus removes the element of surprise and allows them to prepare for the action.[208] This was the case in the 1988 strike. Fears of mass dismissals and strong action against striking workers were amplified by Seifsa seeking legal advice

on having the strike ballot declared invalid because correct procedures had not been observed in all plants, and by a report leaked to *The Weekly Mail*[209] that the executive director of Seifsa, Brian Angus, advised employers to ballot for an industry-wide lock-out. Seifsa also advised members to take advantage of the current unemployment and introduce scabs wherever possible. In addition, Barlow Rand continued to conduct its sustained assault on centralised bargaining and attempted to exclude its factories from the ambit of the strike by taking legal action. Immediately prior to the strike, Barlow Manufacturing obtained an urgent Industrial Court order interdicting Numsa members from striking on the grounds that a strike over Nicisemi negotiations on wages would be illegal. Numsa succeeded in getting the interdict dismissed using the argument that all the issues not covered by the plant agreement were covered by the Council's Main Agreement and that the negotiations therefore did have a bearing on the workers at Barlow Manufacturing. Numsa also argued that since the Main Agreement only provided for minimum wages, and that wages negotiated at plant level were higher, the Barlow's Manufacturing workers had a definite interest in the outcome of the negotiations.[210] Everyone was feeling the pressure.

Role of National Company Councils

In order fully to understand Numsa's statement, "IMF members decided to take strategic action primarily in the major industrial areas and some of the companies which are important in Seifsa decision-making." it is necessary to take a step backwards and to explore Mawu and Numsa's strategy in the creation of National Company Councils.

In a similar bargaining approach to Mawu, Numsa in the engineering sector maintained an all level bargaining policy. This allowed the union to accommodate the negotiation of different issues in an appropriate forum. It believed that minimum wages in the industry should be decided at industry level and supplementary issues such as long service allowances, bonuses, merit awards and so on, which were company specific, should be negotiated at plant or company level. In addition there were companies who were not party to the Industrial Council which were covered by other labour legislation or institutional arrangements. The large national company Metal Box,[211] for example, was mainly covered by the Wage Act (1925) where wages were set by Wage Determination Boards which gazetted minimum wages and conditions in an area not covered by an industrial council. Wage determinations were notoriously low, considerably lower than for example Nicisemi rates, so of necessity Numsa negotiated wages and conditions at plant level when this was the case.

It was the emergence of National Company Councils in large firms that accommodated the complexity of these varying bargaining forums and which gave the flexibility to deal with different bargaining issues whilst continuing to build the power of the union at centralised industry level.

National Company Councils were organic structures that grew out of plant struggles where workers had won few battles. They were a response to companies that had grown into huge operations incorporating plants across the country in which employers engaged in centralised planning and policy making. Mawu built the first company council in 1983, the Barlow Shopsteward Council, in an attempt to unite shopstewards in Barlow plants producing different goods in order to strategise, and standardise their conditions.[212] Barlow was becomingly increasingly concerned with the union's demands to negotiate non-wage issues, such as where plants should be sited, and it was determined to curb Mawu's power. As a *Weekly Mail* article of the time commented, "Firms such as Barlow no longer questioned the unions' right to bargain; but they were eager to limit what they could bargain about."[213] The Barlow Council, however, did not survive because the union lacked sufficient resources to mobilise workers across the numerous Barlow companies. Shortly after, the GWU and Mawu brought shopstewards in Dorbyl companies together to discuss common grievances and to strategise around joint action on severance pay but lack of resources remained a debilitating problem.[214]

In Numsa the issue of co-ordination across a single company remained a problem. Members in large companies still negotiated at plant level, seldom dealt with company policy makers, and although belonging to the same union, remained divided with little knowledge of the conditions, strategies or actions planned by fellow workers in other plants. In 1986, Mawu had decided to deal more systematically with the formation of Company Councils by employing a national organiser, Bobbie Marie, who was tasked with establishing, and assisting shop steward councils. His mandate was continued in Numsa where the union's expanded resources (in 1988 it cost at least R1000 to co-ordinate one National Council meeting[215]) allowed for much greater success than formerly. Its strategy was to focus on organising Company Councils in large companies whose directors were powerful in the leadership of Seifsa and hence highly influential in Nicisemi negotiations. As Marie explained, "The national company shopsteward council was not for wage bargaining but to consolidate at the bottom, because when you sit across the table at the IC [Industrial Council] and you're dealing with Dorbyl, Iscor, they're the ones that are running the Council, so if you organise their plants that gives you the leverage on the Council."[216] The union's Living Wage Campaign contributed successfully to this strategy because it built a set of strong national demands which company councils could focus their negotiations around, "Through the councils, workers are grouping together against the divisions that bosses have maintained within the industry", commented national organiser Marie in 1986.[217]

Company councils generally focussed on the acquisition of standard organisational rights across the company rather than on wage negotiations. Thus individual reasons for forming Company Councils, and the form collective bargaining took, often differed. The Henred Company Council emerged because management insisted on negotiating at a national level, whilst the Metal Box Council was formed in response to the difficulty of fragmented bargaining across individual plants scattered countywide. "We had Metal Box in Natal and we had reached the limit... we wanted a more co-ordinated national strategy so I started to reach across from Natal to Transvaal." explained Marie.[218] Shopstewards from 15 Metal Box plants, employing 4 000 workers, constituted the council which aimed to share information so that shopstewards could speak with a united national voice during plant negotiations, co-ordinate action, and ensure that a victory won at one plant was implemented in others.[219]

At Dorbyl, Numsa developed one of its largest Company Councils. In 1987 as many as 100 Dorbyl shopstewards attended meetings from about 34 plants which the formation of Numsa had brought under one roof. In 1986 Dorbyl management insisted on negotiating at plant level alone, so, according to Marie the union's strategy involved "... grouping together and targeting them nationally. If we are able to establish ourselves as a power in the Metkor/Dorbyl group, we should be able to shake the Industrial Council quite a bit. Right now we are going to be more strategic in

the way we challenge the Council [Nicisemi] by challenging the bigger and more significant groups."[220] The union wanted to negotiate non-wage issues in a national company bargaining forum and to standardise these conditions across all plants around such concerns as service increments, paid leave for shopsteward training, arbitration in cases of dismissal, and severance pay. Over a nine month period the Dorbyl Shopstewards Council debated a strategy and conducted an in-company campaign which required frequent national meetings, a high level of co-ordination across every factory, and assistance from national office bearers to communicate across regions in order to maintain organisational momentum and to put sustained pressure on the company. In addition in 1987 it became clear that in order to liaise effectively with each plant, Dorbyl workers needed regional councils to discuss the progress of the campaign. The union's strategy entailed submitting the same demands to all Dorbyl plants. The individual factories immediately refused to negotiate any issues concerning company policy which they did not have the power to change and which had to be decided on a national company level. The next step was to declare a dispute at every factory through the Industrial Council where it was finally agreed that instead of holding 30 separate Industrial Council meetings the company should negotiate at divisional level. Ultimately, the company was forced to concede to the union's demands and to standardise conditions across all plants. In 1988 Numsa won the first compulsory arbitration facility in cases of dismissal which included the right to employ the services of arbitration consultants such as IMSSA, three days shopstewards leave for training purposes, and, after a ten year struggle, the company agreed to severance pay and a common retrenchment procedure across plants.[221]

By the late 1980s, company councils had been established in Siemens, Iscor, Dorbyl, Eskom, Henred Fruehauf, Van Leer, Metal Box, GEC, RIH, Reunert, Nampak, Barlow Manufacturing, Altron, Aberdare Cables, Altech, Powertech, Haggie Rand, Steeldale Reinforcing and Boart International. As a result companies such as Van Leer, Henred Fruehauf, Siemens, Escom, Sandvik, and Iscor had set up national bargaining forums. In addition certain sector-based shop steward councils had emerged. Ppwawu (Paper Wood & Allied Workers Union) and Numsa, for example, both had members at Afcol, so shopstewards from the unions sat on a joint shop steward council.[222]

It was these company councils, including some covered by House Agreements, that played a pivotal role in the 1988 strategic strike. According to Smith, "... this is where the work we'd done in the shop stewards councils came to help. Dorbyl, Haggie Rand, Siemens - a spread of National Shopstewards Councils. And what we did then was, we decided to have strategic strike action in the National Councils. These happened to be the main decision-makers in the Council [Nicisemi]. So we were moering[223] them up, and they were feeling the pain ..."[224]

1988 Strategic strike and assessment

The 1988 strike admirably demonstrated Tarrow's contention that people with limited resources can engage in significant action, "When their actions are based on dense social networks and connective structures and draw on consensual and action orientated frames, they can sustain these actions in conflict with powerful opponents.[225] On August 1 more than 23 000 workers in 111 factories struck. Local strike committees, consisting of one shopsteward from each factory, local office bearers and local organisers, were set up, whilst IMF regional negotiating and campaign committees, and Numsa regional secretaries sat on regional strike committees. Simultaneously, National Company Shopsteward Council meetings were held to assess the strike and its continuance. All these structures regularly communicated with head office around the mood on the ground. A week later over 31 083 workers in 180 factories[226] were on strike and it was clear that Numsa's demands had resonated widely as it became evident that non-members were also coming out. Simultaneously, the union had ensured that large companies that were not party to the Nicisemi also came out on strike. Four Transvaal Metal Box plants, for example, came out on legal strike following a deadlock in wage negotiations. Although House Agreements were a problem for the union because these workers did not fall under the Main Agreement, in some cases it successfully timed strike action in companies which were major players in Seifsa, such as Iscor, to co-incide with action around the Main Agreement.[227] "All of this created a highly pressurised atmosphere", commented Smith.[228]

Some employers, such as Siemens, began to open up plant level negotiations and offered wages far in excess of Seifsa's final offer which ranged from 56c to 80c per hour as against Seifsa's 41c on the minimum rate.[229] At least 120 companies broke with Seifsa policy and negotiated national demands at plant level either immediately before, or during the strike.[230] Many companies conceded May 1, June 16, March 21, paternity leave and a 40 hour week during these negotiations.[231]

It was at this point, however, in the second week of the strike, that Seifsa approached Numsa with a proposal which conceded to some important demands. It proposed a restructuring of the collective bargaining system in the industry and to recognise Numsa as the major union on the Nicisemi. In addition it put forward a R 3,02 an hour (17,4 per cent) wage increase on the minimum and agreed to discuss the closing of the apartheid wage gap. It was willing to swop May 1 and June 16 for other government paid holidays (the government had declared Workers' Day on the first Monday of May) and to set up procedures, including arbitration, to look into complaints of racism, violence, and intimidation in the industry without having to resort to the Industrial Court. In addition it agreed to encourage companies to re-instate workers who were dismissed or locked-out during a legal strike. Finally it agreed that automatic stop-order facilities be granted to all

unions party to the Industrial Council. For four years the CMBU unions had blocked Numsa in this demand saying that stop order rights should only be given to unions which signed the Main Agreement. This signalled an end to time consuming negotiations for check-off facilities in individual engineering companies. After extensive consultation with workers on Seifsa's proposals, the IMF alliance called off the strike and for the first time Numsa signed the Main Agreement.[232]

The government immediately attacked the agreement. The Minister of Manpower refused to gazette it until seven days before its expiry in June 1989 on the grounds that he would never publish `revolutionary holidays` (June 16 and May 1) and that he was unable to backdate wage increases and make them binding on employers who were not Nicisemi members because the Council did not represent sufficient workers in the industry.[233] The irony was that Numsa's membership had made it more representative than ever before. The minister's refusal to sign the agreement meant that concessions made by employers could not be extended to non-parties and thus huge numbers of workers in the industry were excluded from the benefits of increased minimum wages.

In addition the strike had thrown up a range of organisational and ideological weaknesses with which the union had to now contend. Firstly, the alliance with other IMF unions came under scrutiny. Numsa had been successful in ensuring that popular worker demands had been jointly agreed but in its second aim of influencing other IMF unions' membership it believed it had "failed hopelessly".[234] This was chiefly because Numsa had overestimated the other unions' ability to mobilise their membership and it felt that Numsa's "engineering sector did not make enough of an effort to develop the campaigns to include other workers."[235] Few of the other unions' members attended joint rallies and shopsteward councils and Numsa speculated that their structures were too weak to enable this to happen. In addition, they seemed fearful, and uncommitted, to taking strike action. Moreover, there was little co-operation from the leadership of the other IMF unions and they did not attend strike committee meetings. They were never able to provide Numsa with their membership figures, nor did they report the results of their strike ballots which they counted separately in contravention to an agreement with Numsa. The union speculated that the combined membership of the other three IMF unions was in the region of 20 000 and that in the light of their own increased membership and new position of power on the Council such an alliance was no longer necessary.[236]

Secondly, the union leadership although pleased with the integration of membership within the union in the engineering sector which it felt "occurs much more easily and effectively in campaigns than it does by just talking to members."[237] was disturbed by the lack of support from

Numsa members in other sectors of the union. The union was concerned by what it saw as "a very economistic" and "parochial" attitude on the part of membership whereby issues of money which they believed would generate more personal gain took precedence over concern with "the conditions and struggles of other workers, both in and outside of the engineering industry."[238] The incidence of plant bargaining in some large engineering companies before or during the strike where workers had significantly raised their wages, had weakened the strike. As factories settled, they withdrew from the action.[239]

In both of the above respects the union pinpointed the "irrelevance" of the Education Department's role in the Nicisemi campaign. It believed that in future the Department should be fully integrated into the Living Wage Campaign by providing education to membership on national demands and through conscientizing workers and raising debate on the structures, processes and role of centralised bargaining. What union leadership was encountering here was an uncomfortable contradiction engendered by the progressive separation between organisation/organising campaigns and union education. Adrienne Bird, a Mawu (and later Numsa) Transvaal regional educator describes here the closeness of this relationship in the early days when she co-ordinated Mawu and Fosatu shopstewards courses,

> They were bizarre events... You'd have three or four hundred shopstewards trying to run some kind of learning in that... We used to have some quite good debates, but they were all in these vast general meetings, but people were doing them because they were desperate for information and desperate for any kind of help that would help them with the battles they were fighting in the factories. They were usually three or four days. We used to run them in the Germiston office where the alleyways always smelt of dagga [cannabis]and urine...
>
> Education was an integral part of organising... In the early days education and organising were just the same thing , undifferentiated, when you went to the factory gates you did both, and you did one through the other...
>
> There was this sense that `alright we've organised and we've got committees all over the place, and they've got this thin understanding, can you make it deeper.` And that's the time when they started to appoint education officers. And so there started to become the split between organising and education. And always the further it got away from organising, the more the relationships became an issue...
>
> But there were always problems about if there's conflict between education and organising, the education one would fall away... So there's the feeling that we'll create more distance, and then we'll be able to have a decent education programme - it won't get cancelled every time.[240]

This struggle to maintain this close link between education and organising would remain an on-going challenge for the union as it grew in size and organisational complexity. The union was aware that if it was to push forward its ideological and organisational programme/objectives on the Nicisemi it would have to find ways of addressing this problem.

Thirdly, the union leadership acknowledged the under-developed nature of the union's local and regional constitutional structures which was partly the responsibility of national staff who failed to develop the union's recently adopted campaign structures. At a local level Numsa shopstewards councils were unable to establish strong campaign structures. Local shopsteward councils were enmeshed in discussing local factory problems and were becoming dangerously near to performing the function of factory shopsteward committees. The result was that shopstewards attending such locals were bored and frustrated with discussing other factory problems and seldom had the opportunity to be properly informed of regional and national campaigns. Consequently there was little debate or planning around campaign work at a local level. In many cases too, Regional Congresses and Regional Executive Committees were not yet functioning as policy bodies and were focussed on administrative matters which did not take into account the spreading of information and follow-up on national campaign decisions. The union acknowledged however that to criticize regions for the focus on administrative matters did not solve the problem as regional office bearers were over-loaded and other layers of leadership needed to be developed.[241]

Finally, the union isolated the problem of a general lack of national staff participation in one of the union's most important campaigns. National structures, in particular engineering officials, had failed to engage organisers in discussions of strategy and tactics. The union concluded that leadership and the National Campaigns Co-ordinating Committee (NCC) needed to meet later in the year in order to timeously plan around the following year's Industrial Council negotiations (1989).[242]

From the foregoing assessment it would appear that the strike had thrown up more problems than achievements. The union, however, felt it had achieved significant shifts. Smith believed, "The 1988 `Strategic Strike`, as we called it, was very, very successful."[243] Firstly, Seifsa's concession on wages was of great importance even though the union had not won its R5 an hour demand. It had significantly raised wage levels in the industry for unorganised workers and by so doing had attracted many of these workers into the union. Its paid-up membership increased from 167 000 to 183 000 within three months of the strike.[244] Secondly, for organised membership who were not covered by the Nicisemi it made their task of bargaining on wages at company level much easier. This applied equally to the bargaining of supplementary increases in Nicisemi companies. As the union commented, "The majority of workers in the industry are employed by companies which will always look only at what they can get away with: the industry minima are very influential in determining their attitude. It is much, much easier to bargain supplementary increases when a minimum has been established..."[245] Seifsa was later to claim the raising of the minimum wage in the industry in the 1980s as one of its successes, "... The Seifsa minimum wage has been a target of

achievement for many other industries…The federation (Seifsa) had steered the industry to significant black advancement. The wage gap between unskilled and skilled workers had been narrowed from a ration of 5:1 in 1961 to 2,8:1 in the early eighties."[246] The Seifsa publication forgot to mention that the union had been forced to wage a major industry strike in the late 1980s in order to shift employers into offering an adequate minimum wage.

Furthermore, the strike had opened up extensive plant level bargaining where members won significant wage improvements. This was not what the union in reality wanted. It had acknowledged that "it was a mixed blessing", but it needed the threat of this possibility to force employers to concede that Numsa was a power that they had to accommodate on the Council. As Smith explained,

> We actually forced these companies to come and negotiate at plant level. And that was the major turning point of the industrial council. Because I think there was a realisation that if they wanted to maintain the industrial council, they would then have to start taking us very seriously at that level. Or we could do very serious damage at plant level. If we just withdrew, and started beating them with strikes at plant level they were gone.[247]

For the union, however, by far the most significant victory was that the strike had changed "the balance of power in the industry by preventing the employers and the minister from using their old tactic of using the CMBU to break off bargaining prematurely."[248] Employers were surprised that Numsa went on strike at all and had not anticipated the strategic strike action for which Numsa opted. For the first time, the strike had forced Seifsa to move its final offer after it had signed an agreement with the CMBU unions. In addition the strike had "... made a major dent in Seifsa's ability to hold its members."[249] Again, for the first time Seifsa had agreed to informal negotiations between Numsa and itself on the restructuring of collective bargaining in the industry. In the past it had refused to negotiate with Numsa without the presence of the CMBU unions on the Council. Now it was forced to come to the uncomfortable realisation that, as the *Finance Week* expressed it, "... the Industrial Council's request to the Manpower Minister to sign the main agreement but exclude members of four affiliates (including Numsa) could not work."[250]

The strike had convinced membership that Numsa was serious in its determination to make an impact at industry level and to raise wages and work conditions wherever metal workers laboured. This in turn triggered a shift in the way metal workers came to see their power. The strike and its result had raised the possibility of wielding power in a more coherent, planned and strategic way across the industry as a whole. The union had complained of membership's narrow, economistic vision of wage bargaining and their inability to identify with more exploited workers, but it had in fact allowed for a shift in workers' perspective. This shift, combined with its new status on the Council, would allow it to engage employers on a fundamental restructuring of the industry.

7. Conclusion

By 1983 Mawu was the largest trade union in the country with 80 000 members yet it was unable to make any meaningful impact on the metal industry as a whole. Its response to this crisis was, after lengthy debate, to enter the Industrial Council arguing that this was the best way to unite and mobilise workers nationally across the engineering industry and to make gains for both organised and unorganised workers. This was a "decisive moment" in the union's history.

On the Nicisemi the union was faced with an alliance of employers and white craft unions which in effect rendered it powerless to achieve a significant rise in minimum wages. It was faced with the problem of how to build power on the Council whilst continuing to deliver gains to membership. It responded by adopting an `all level bargaining` policy whereby it pursued the struggle for the right to plant bargain in order to raise its members' wages and working conditions, whilst continuing in its attempts to expose the fraudulent bargaining relationships that existed on the Council. This it did by building power on a number of different fronts both within and outside of the Council.

It adopted as its main bargaining thrust a set of demands to achieve a living wage. Thereafter it built a highly visible and successful Living Wage campaign which was immensely contradictory in that the union led a national mobilisation *against* the Council in order to build power *on* the Council. Simultaneously it continued to pursue its previous fragmented plant based bargaining. A powerful by-product of this perverse campaign was that it enabled the union to mobilise, and bring in, huge numbers of metal workers and to weld them into a national union. Tarrow has described a similar process in the construction of social movements, "As opportunities widen and information spreads about the susceptibility of a polity to challenge... clashes between early challengers and authorities reveal the weak points of the latter and the strengths of the former, inviting even timid social actors to align themselves on one side or another."[251] Despite Lester's warning against the "naive notion that size and power are directly correlated"[252], increased size was essential for Numsa both to establish its power on the Nicisemi through greater union representivity in the industry, and to generate increased efficiencies which would enable it, for example, to build empowering structures such as National Company Councils. Superior numbers would later allow it to argue for, and win, proportional representation on the Nicisemi and thus prevent the white unions from re-establishing their power on the Industrial Council.

Mawu focussed its attention on the organisation of large companies with power and influence on the Nicisemi in order to exert pressure during negotiations. One of the instruments it effectively built to achieve this was the National Company Council which united workers across plants in a single company to strategise and to standardise demands and conditions. Company Councils were also built in firms which were not party to the Nicisemi Main Agreement, such as those falling

under House Agreements, thus enabling these workers to make considerable gains.

The union pursued an aggressive plant bargaining strategy in its campaign to win a living wage and achieved some notable gains which it used to benchmark its living wage demands on the Council against. Many companies were forced to break with the Seifsa directive to bargain wages at central level alone as they came under increasing pressure in their plants. On the Industrial Council however, despite increased membership Mawu was unable to mobilise sufficient power or resources to rupture the power bloc and wage increases continued to fall below inflation levels. The merging of unions organising in the metal industry in 1987 gave the engineering sector a significant injection of power. By building bureaucratic power the union was able to approach Nicisemi negotiations in a different manner. Its leadership was determined to break the corrupt bargaining patterns that characterised Nicisemi negotiations and thereafter to enter into genuine negotiations to effect changes across the industry. In 1987 it balloted metal workers for the first time on industry-wide action although such action was thwarted by the interference of the Minister of Manpower. It was the 1988 negotiations however that marked a truly significant departure when Numsa launched strategic strike action in a number of large companies in which Seifsa was influential. This action forced Nicisemi employers significantly to increase wage rates and compelled many employers to conclude plant level negotiations in which workers frequently achieved wage increases above Council minima. Ironically, Numsa's position as the 'weak' outsider on the Industrial Council lent its actions a peculiar power. It was not party to the established 'routinised' bargaining relationships to which Fantasia refers. Fantasia in his case-studies of a number of strikes in the United States concluded that, "In each case where workers mobilised their solidarity in conflict, a degree of independence from bureaucratic constraints was required...As long as workers kept within the bounds of the routinized industrial relations system.. they were necessarily shackled in their battle against the employer."[253] Although Numsa was a registered party to the Industrial Council, and was therefore obliged to follow formal dispute procedures, its precarious position on the Nicisemi meant structurally it had "a degree of independence from bureaucratic constraints" and could thus mobilise solidarity and participate in major strike action against the Industrial Council. Its strategies brought into question the assertion by Davies that "…should the involvement of African unions in conciliation type procedures become in the future state policy, there may be certain advantages over the present situation which can be utilised, but in the last analysis it will remain a means of continuing domination over African labour."[254]

Numsa was however a victim of its own success as members who settled at plant level withdrew from the strike and weakened the union's action. Employers also faced the contradiction of emerging union power on the Industrial Council in which they had so long exhorted the union to

participate. The union had demonstrated that employers ignored it at their own risk and had established the political point that when "one side refuses to compromise beyond a specific point" it exerts "a profound influence over subsequent negotiations."[255]

Numsa had revealed itself as an organisation that was able to wield power in a complex manner across a number of fronts. Ultimately, it was the 1988 strategic strike that broke employers' resistance to Numsa's full entry to the Nicisemi. This was the wielding of direct oppositional power on a massive scale. This was however the end result of assembling power through the building of unity, numbers and a more efficient union bureaucracy, through the building of alliances, through strategic organisation and industrial action, and through the ideological "shaping of grievances into broader and more resonant claims" via the Living Wage campaign. Numsa had demonstrated that participation on the Industrial Council was not a zero sum game in which industry wide bargaining could only proceed at the expense of plant bargaining. The union had succeeded in raising wages significantly at both bargaining levels. Numsa had also demonstrated to its critics that despite the existence of an employer/white union power bloc, it had succeeded in overcoming this obstacle to become Seifsa's major bargaining partner on the Council. It had in effect for the first time attained an institutional power which would enable it to engage in shaping the future of the industry.

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109. *Fosatu Worker News* "Anti-union group of companies" No 29 May 1989, personal copy.
110. *Fosatu Worker News* "Metal workers push for higher wages after IC sell out" No 23 Aug 1983, personal copy.
111. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Mawu's first National Congress" Vol 11 No 7 August 1986.
112. *Umbiko we Mawu* "Industrial Council negotiations: We will not accept scraps" Vol 4 April 1986, personal copy.
113. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
114. Fosatu/Mawu Collection, University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department Box AH 1999/ C1.13.Mawu pamphlet "No 2 Boycott Overtime!"
115. University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department Mawu Collection Box AH 1077/ H.9*Umbiko we Mawu* "Deadlock" and "National Campaigns" July 1986; *SA Metal Worker* "Metal unions criticise new maternity proposal" Vol 1 No 6 Oct 1986, personal copy.
116. *South African Labour Bulletin* (1986) "Mawu's first National Congress".
117. *SA Metalworker* "Metal shopstewards take the initiative" Vol 1 No 6 October 1986, personal copy.

118. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Metal talks and Mawu's national wage campaign" Vol 12 No 3 Mar/Apr 1987.
119. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH 2065/ F1.2. "Unite and Fight for a Living Wage Metal, Metal and Allied Workers Union, Presentation for the National Negotiations at the National Industrial Council for the Metal Industry - 10 March 1987".
120. Discussion with Bobbie Marie, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice on collective bargaining in Mawu and Numsa, 1996.
121. Discussion with Bobbie Marie, Johannesburg, September 1996.
122. Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
123. In 1986 Moses Mayekiso was arrested by security police and held in solitary confinement under the Internal Security Act, detention without trial, for seven months. He was then charged with treason, subversion and sedition together with his brother Mzwanele Mayekiso, and other community activists. The state put forward a 100 pages of charges, and accused Mayekiso and others of trying to usurp the authority of the state by setting up `organs of people's power` in Alexandra township. The state also charged Mayekiso with mobilising workers and the community against the capitalist system in order that ` the working class or its unions and progressive organisations should seize control of the means of production and residential areas.` The trial finally began in October 1987. Mayekiso and fellow accused were released after 900 days in jail, on a bail of R 10 000.The state brought 72 witnesses but could not prove its case and they were released. The trial ended in 1989. For part of the time Peter Dantjies stood in for Mayekiso as acting General Secretary of Numsa.
124. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
125. Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, November 1996.
126. Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
127. Interview Kosi Matlala, Pretoria, November 1996.
128. Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, November 1996.
129. Interview Jenny Isaacs, Johannesburg, October, 1996.
130. Interview Des East, Johannesburg, June 1997.
131. Interview Jenny Isaacs, Johannesburg, October 1996.
132. Numsa, 4th National Congress, July 1993, personal collection.
133. Ibid.
134. Interview Jenny Isaacs, Johannesburg, 1996.
135. Later Janine Bellingan's family asked Numsa to work with them to stop Bellingan from receiving amnesty from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for a political murder. The union hired a private detective to try and find out the exact amount of money Bellingan stole. In 1997 Numsa began a court case against Jay Naidoo, Minister of Communications, and Sydney Mufamadi, Minister of Safety and Security, for damages the union suffered, and to try and get this money back. (*Weekly Mail* "Unions target ministers for apartheid damages" October 3-9, 1997)
136. Interview Jenny Isaacs, Johannesburg, 1996.
137. Interview Kosi Matlala, Pretoria, November 1996.
138. Ibid.
139. *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 1 No 1 February 1990, personal copy.
140. Interview Jenny Isaacs, Johannesburg, 1996.
141. Interview Kosi Matlala, Pretoria, November 1996.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid.
144. Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
145. Ibid.
146. Numsa member from Eastern Cape Region Focus Group discussion, September 1997.
147. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
148. Interview Kosi Matlala, Pretoria, November 1996.
149. Ibid.
150. Ibid.
151. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
152. Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
153. Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, November 1996.

cliv. *SA Metal Worker* "Unspectacular first round in metal industry's premier fight" Vol 2 No 1 Mar/Apr 1987, personal copy..
clv. "Mawu fighting for a Living Wage" (1987), (Mawu, Germiston), personal copy.
156. Ibid, p7
157. The HSL (Household Subsistence Level) was calculated by academics at Port Elizabeth University every six months. It assumed every worker had five dependents which was according to Mawu much greater because of unemployment. It was calculated on the cost of food, clothing, fuel and lighting, washing and cleaning, rent, and transport to and from work. The union complained that it did not cover such things as transport to shops, doctors, schools, social events; clothes for children; childcare costs, school uniforms and books, adult education and leisure activities, holidays, medical expenses, pension and UIF and Burial Fund contributions, PAYE deductions, and occasional expenses such as furniture, fridges, and washing machines.
158. "Mawu fighting for a Living Wage" (1987:5), (Mawu, Germiston) personal copy.
159. Ibid.
160. *SA Metalworker* "Maternity Victory" Vol 2 No 1 March/April 1987, personal copy.
161. Numsa (1989): *Numsa Women Organise!* (Numsa), personal copy.
162. Ibid, p41.
163. Ibid, p40.
164. Interview Dorothy Mokgalo, Johannesburg, June 1997. Mokgalo joined Mawu in 1981 when she worked for National Bolts in Boksburg. She was elected a shopsteward in 1985 which was highly unusual in a male dominated factory with only 15 women. She was elected secretary of the Johannesburg Numsa shopsteward council education sub-committee together with four other men and rose to become Numsa Nedcom (National Education Committee) chair and Cosatu's first gender co-ordinator. She died in a taxi accident in 1997.
165. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Metalworkers win 6 months paid maternity" Vol 12 No 3 Mar/Apr 1987.
166. *Work in Progress* "No National Strike But Metal Union Grows" 49, September 1987 and *South African Labour Bulletin* "Numsa Calls Off the Strike" Vol 12 No 6 Aug/Sept 1987.
167. University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH 2065/F1.2. "Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage campaign in the Engineering Industry - October 2 , 1988 (Internal document)".
168. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Numsa Calls Off the Strike".
169. Ibid.
170. Hyman, Richard (1972) *Strikes*, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow; Miliband R (1969:80) *The State in Capitalist Society* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.
171. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
172. Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997.
173. *Work in Progress* "No National Strike But Metal Union Grows" 49, September 1987.
174. Ibid.
175. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Numsa Calls Off the Strike".
176. Ibid.
177. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065/F1.2. "Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988".
178. Ibid.
179. Ibid.
180. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Metal Industry Negotiations" Vol 14 No1 April 1989.
181. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065/F1.2. "Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988".
182. Ibid.
183. Ibid.
184. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
185. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Briefings: Numsa develops new campaign structures" Vol 13 No 3 March/April 1988.
186. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Stayaway survey, June 6-8" Vol 13 No 6, September 1988.
187. Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.

188. "The General Secretary's Report to the Numsa National Congress to be held on 18 - 21 May 1989", personal copy.
189 *Strength in Diversity: Seifsa 60 years(2000)* Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (Seifsa), Johannesburg.
190. Ibid.
191. The Electrical & Allied Workers Trade Union of SA (Eawtusa); the Steel, Engineering & Allied Workers Union (Seawu); and the Engineering & Allied Workers Union (Eawu).
192. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065/F1.2. "Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988".
193. "Industrial Council for the Iron , Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry Minutes Special General Meeting of the Council held in the Ian McGregor Hall, New Civic Centre, Germiston. on Tuesday 12 April 1988 at 09h15", documents held at Metal & Engineering Industries Bargaining Council (MEIBC), Anderson Street, Johannesburg.
194. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
195. "Industrial Council for the Iron , Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry Minutes Special General Meeting of the Council held in the Ian McGregor Hall, New Civic Centre, Germiston. on Tuesday 12 April 1988 at 09h15", documents held at Metal & Engineering Industries Bargaining Council (MEIBC), Anderson Street, Johannesburg.
196. Ibid.
197. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996; Jabu Matiko "Metal Unions Unite for a Living Wage" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 3 March/April 1988.
198. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
199. Quoted in Jabu Matiko "Metal Unions Unite for a Living Wage" in *South African Labour Bulletin*.
200. The `stayaway` was more than a general strike because the action involved not only workers but all community members in townships including students at educational institutions, members of the community conducting their daily tasks such as shopping, visiting doctors etc, and because demands were explicitly political in nature and were mainly directed at the state but sometimes also at employers.
201. Karl von Holdt: "June 1988: three-day stayaway against new Labour Bill " in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 6 September 1988.
202. The General Secretary's Report to the Numsa National Congress to be held on 18 - 21 May 1989, personal copy.
203. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Metal Workers Prove their Strength" Jabu Matiko Vol 13 No 6 September 1988.
204. "Industrial Council for the Iron , Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry Minutes Special General Meeting of the Council held in the Ian McGregor Hall, First Floor, New Civic Centre, Germiston. on Tuesday 10 May 1988 at 09h15". Minutes held at Metal & Engineering Industries Bargaining Council (MEIBC), Anderson Street, Johannesburg.
205. Ibid
206. *South African Labour Bulletin* "Metal Workers Prove their Strength".
207. *Numsa National Strike Report*, 11 August 1988, personal copy.
208. Hyman, Richard (1972) *Strikes*.
209. *Weekly Mail*, 7 July 1988.
210. *Work in Progress* "One union, one industry one demand" No 65 April 1990; Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
211. Discussion with Bobbie Marie, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice on collective bargaining in Mawu and Numsa, 1996.
212. Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
213. Ibid, p342.
214. Ibid.
215. *Cosatu Worker News* "Numsa builds councils to challenge monopoly capital" May 1988.
216. Discussion with Bobbie Marie, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice on collective bargaining in Mawu and Numsa, 1996.

217. *SA Metalworker* “Metal shopstewards take the initiative” Vol 1 No 6 October 1986, personal copy.
218. Discussion with Bobbie Marie, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice on collective bargaining in Mawu and Numsa, 1996.
219. *Cosatu News* “Metal Box shopstewards council” Vol 1 No 1 Aug 1986, Dirk Hartford collection.
220. *SA Metalworker* “Metal shopstewards take the initiative” Vol 1 No 6 October 1986, personal copy.
221. *Cosatu Worker News* “Numsa builds councils to challenge monopoly capital” May 1988 and discussion with Bobbie Mare, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice on collective bargaining in Mawu and Numsa, 1996. IMSSA (Independent Mediation Service of South Africa) was an arbitration/mediation service widely used by employers and trade unions at the time in the resolution of disputes.
222. “National Union of Metalworkers of SA: The General Secretary’s Report to the Numsa National Congress to be held on 18 - 21 May 1989", personal copy.
223. Afrikaans slang meaning to beat someone up.
224. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[225] Tarrow, S (1998:10): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom).
226. *Numsa National Strike Report*, 11 August 1988, personal copy.
227. It worked the other way as well where companies falling under the Main Agreement were not able to lend support to workers falling under house agreements. In 1988 about 2000 workers at Haggie Rand went on a six week strike immediately after the 1988 engineering strike, a worker recalls: “We went to all Wits locals asking for support. The Numsa Johannesburg local was only able to support us financially. It seems other metalworkers were tired after their strike.” (Jabu Matiko “Numsa strike at Haggie builds national industrial bargaining” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 7 November 1988.)
228. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
229. *Numsa National Strike Report* “National Strike Update” 11 August 1988, personal copy.
230. “National Union of Metalworkers of SA: The General Secretary’s Report to the Numsa National Congress to be held on 18 - 21 May 1989", personal copy.
231. *South African Labour Bulletin* “Metal Workers Prove their Strength” Jabu Matiko Vol 13 No 6 September 1988.
232. Ibid.
233. “National Union of Metalworkers of SA: The General Secretary’s Report to the Numsa National Congress to be held on 18 - 21 May 1989", personal copy
234. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065/F1.2. “Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988”.
235. Ibid.
236. Ibid.
237. Ibid.
238. Ibid.
239. *South African Labour Bulletin* “Metal Workers Prove their Strength”.
240. Quote taken from an interview with Adrienne Bird conducted by Matthew Ginsberg, 1996.
241. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065/F1.2. “Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988”.
242. Ibid.
243. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
244. *Work in Progress* “Labour “ 56/57 November/December 1988.
245. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH2065 “Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988”.
[246] *Strength in Diversity: Seifsa 60 years* (2000:14) Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (Seifsa), Johannesburg.
247. Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
248. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, The Taffy Adler Collection Box AH 2065/F1.2. “Assessment of the 1988 Living Wage Campaign in the Engineering Industry: Numsa internal document, October 2, 1988”.

249. *Numsa National Strike Report*, 11 August 1988, personal copy.
250. *Finance Week*, 31 August 1988.
251. Tarrow, S (199824): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom).
252. Lester, Richard (1958:23): *As Unions Mature: An Analysis of the Evolution of American Unionism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
253. Fantasia, Rick (1988:229) *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press.
254. Davies, R (1978) "The class character of South Africa's industrial conciliation legislation" in *Essays in Southern African labour history* E Webster (ed) Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
255. Hyman, Richard (1972:113) *Strikes*.

Chapter 5

Building power in national bargaining forums
Focus on Auto

1. Introduction

It is necessary before continuing with the discussion of building power in the engineering industry to return to another sector of Numsa, the auto sector. As the process of building trade union power in the South African metal industry is traced in these chapters it will become apparent that Numsa has been concerned to link the different parts of this industry in a strategy to build overall power and to improve working conditions across the entire metal sector. It was in 1989, where this thesis interrupted its discussion of the engineering sector in the previous chapter, that the union started seriously to develop strategies which would link together its different industrial sectors. It was in this year that Numsa devised an integrated bargaining strategy which incorporated common demands across its industries. In order to comprehend this new approach however, it is necessary first to have an understanding of how other sectors of the union, namely the auto and motor sectors, were developing power in their spheres and what achievements they had made to this point. It may appear that the choice of investigating the auto sector at this point is an arbitrary one. It is in fact a choice informed by the union's own approach to its bargaining priorities as at this point in its history the auto sector took priority over the motor sector.

In exploring the growth of union power in the auto sector it is instructive to compare it from time to time with the engineering sector of Mawu/Numsa. The auto sector's roots in the Eastern Cape and the nature of the industry often engendered different dynamics and strategic decisions in the build up of power and influence from those in engineering. These differences were later, at times, to lead to tensions and misunderstandings in the development of Numsa's integrated bargaining strategy.

2. Building power in auto, tyre, rubber 1982 - 1986

Introduction

The expansion of Naawu to the Northern Transvaal entailed intensive plant by plant struggles to gain recognition and to establish in-company bargaining rights. Collective bargaining in the Eastern Cape took a different form however. In this region, as previously mentioned, the union was registered and was party to the Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry

which represented the large auto assemblers. The struggles waged on this Council ultimately influenced bargaining methods and demands not only in the auto sector as a whole but also in unions countrywide because as Bonner observed, "The motor unions brought with them a unique set of experiences into Fosatu... They brought with them an understanding of industry-wide organisation, together with a sense of pragmatism and power not shared by the rest of the unions. They represented a clear majority of motor workers in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area, and were able to bargain from a position of representivity and strength on the industrial council."[1]

The union had long bargained in this centralised forum and unlike, Mawu, was committed to it as the most effective way of managing negotiations across numerous companies and of raising wages and conditions across the industry. It did not believe that participation in such a forum diminished worker control and militancy but rather, as the Volkswagen 1980 dispute had demonstrated, that worker power flexed outside of Industrial Council negotiations could effectively break a deadlock and force employers into a review of their offer. In fact as Bonner observed the auto unions had turned the state's co-option strategy on its head, "Neither registration nor industrial councils had succeeded in taming the motor unions. Instead the whole exercise of registration was being thrown into disarray."[2]

The union however was not in the same fortunate position in its other sub-sectors. It was faced with the cumbersome task of co-ordinating bargaining all year round in a range of different fora within, and across, different sectors of the auto industry whilst simultaneously struggling to gain entry into existing industrial councils where it was refused access. In the early 1980s these fora included bargaining on a regional Eastern Cape industrial council in the assembly sector, whilst it plant bargained in the same sector in Natal and the Transvaal. Then, because the union had not secured sufficient representivity, it was obliged to plant bargain in the motor components and in the rubber and tyre sectors although a national industrial council existed in the former, and an Eastern Cape regional industrial council existed in the latter. Even if it were to gain admission to the regional Tyre and Rubber Council it would still have to conduct a struggle to extend the Council to the Transvaal and Natal. In this complex bargaining situation the Eastern Cape auto assemblers industrial council played an important role in setting the union's overall bargaining agenda across all bargaining fora. Ultimately the union aimed to extend its industrial council strategy in auto assembly to all its sectors. It is for this reason, and also because of the size of membership involved and the length of this study, that this chapter chooses to primarily focus on the auto assembly sub-sector in the auto industry and to devote less attention to the tyre and rubber and motor sub-sectors. In 1985, for example, Naawu had 19, 834 members. Of this membership auto assembly constituted 71 percent or 14 182 members, tyre and rubber constituted 12 per cent or 2 292 members, motor components 10 percent or 1 951 members and the remaining 7 percent were workers in metal engineering.[3] In Naawu the motor sub sector was not significant in numbers

and thus it is not the object of extended focus in this chapter. In Numsa however, following the merger with Micwu, the motor sector would become sufficiently significant in membership numbers to be considered a separate sector in the union. This sector will thus be fully explored in a later chapter. The Naawu motor workers would later be incorporated into Numsa's motor sector. The tyre and rubber sector on the other hand, as in Naawu, would remain a small constituency within the auto sector of Numsa and would reach at most 3 000 members.

Although Numarwosa had been admitted to the Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry in the Eastern Cape, where it bargained on behalf of its coloured membership, it would have to fight some significant battles before it became a leading player on the Council. Employers on the Council negotiated under the umbrella of Ameo (Automobile Manufacturers Employers Organisation) which at different times included General Motors, Ford, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen and Citroen. The Council had been formed in 1969 and negotiated on behalf of skilled white workers through the sole union on the Council, Yster en Staal. By 1976 however Numarwosa's degree of representivity in auto factories had grown to the extent that employers could no longer ignore these organised coloured workers. Nevertheless, employers did not take these workers' concerns seriously and established an informal, cosy and complacent alliance with Yster and Staal to block Numarwosa's demands. Typically, if Numarwosa registered a dispute with the Council over wages, employers would come to an agreement with Yster en Staal and sign a two year Main Agreement. The conditions in this Agreement would be extended to all workers in the industry in the Eastern Cape. By the early 1980s however Yster en Staal was not feeling as secure on the Council as it had formerly felt. The Wiehahn laws now permitted African unions to participate on Industrial Council's and when UAW and Numarwosa merged in 1981, Yster en Staal was confronted with a new union of 17 000 workers. Yster en Staal by contrast represented only 2 000 white artisans.[4]

Numarwosa's first serious dispute within the Council blew up in 1979 when employers indicated that they would conclude an agreement with Yster en Staal and disregard Numarwosa's demands. The union objected and insisted it would not accept an agreement concluded between employers and the white union and would challenge such an agreement in the Supreme Court. In addition it threatened to bring General Motors' membership out on strike. This unnerved employers who agreed to hold separate talks with Numarwosa which culminated in an improved agreement over the one previously negotiated with Yster and Staal. According to Numarwosa negotiator Kettledas, "... the spokesperson of Yster and Staal was very, very angry. His voice was shivering when he learnt that the employers had now struck a better deal with us, and that they now had to agree with it. Because they had already indicated their acceptance of what the employers had offered, and they felt humiliated in the situation."[5]

This breakthrough set the tone for future negotiations. In contrast to Mawu which was endlessly thwarted by obstructive white racist unions on the engineering Council, it was able to make major gains. This was possible for a variety of reasons. Naawu was operating in a much smaller industry where both coloured and African workers were often more skilled than Mawu's engineering members and could consequently wield greater bargaining power. It organised a limited number of huge assembly plants on a regional basis which made it much easier to co-ordinate industry-wide action. In addition, in the auto assembly sector, large factories were generating profits far beyond those garnered by the majority of small engineering enterprises and were consequently in a position to pay more. Moreover, they could not argue, as did the large engineering companies, that smaller companies could not afford to pay the higher wages being demanded. Unlike Mawu, it was faced with one white union, and not a whole battery of white unions combined in the CMBU federation, along with a number of African unions who, although often sympathetic to Mawu's demands, did not support it in taking action. Many auto companies were foreign owned which gave the union additional leverage in times of dispute to mobilise sister unions and anti-apartheid solidarity overseas to compel the head office of the parent company to put pressure on their South African subsidiary to concede to demands. In Mawu this was not the case. There most companies were South African owned, many of them small family concerns, and little outside leverage was available to call upon in times of dispute. All these factors combined with a sophisticated tactical sense, enabled Naawu more rapidly to build up power on the industrial council and in consequence it was able to provide an important model and point of reference for other workers across the country in their struggles.

Raising the living wage in Auto Assembly

In 1982 inflation increased by 14, 8 percent.[6] Thus Naawu's 1982 demands were mainly focused on the attainment of a living wage which by this time it had calculated as R 3,50 minimum per hour for unskilled workers and R 4 for semi-skilled workers.[7] It was Yster en Staal's attempts to block these demands that precipitated a second crisis on the Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry in July 1982. Naawu deadlocked with employers over its living wage demand, which it later dropped to R2, 50, and declared a dispute when employers offered R2,15.[8] The union now faced the prospect of employers signing an agreement with Yster en Staal, or failing which they had the option of going to compulsory arbitration which Council rules stipulated. Naawu leadership decided it was time for a showdown.

Naawu adopted a dual strategy. Firstly it withdrew from the Council. Secondly, General Secretary Fred Sauls announced that, "We believe it is impossible for us to resolve the dispute on the Council. The only way we can achieve this is to bargain plant by plant. But employers insist they will not bargain with us individually."[9] To force plant bargaining and to underline that they were not just posturing by withdrawing from the Council, Naawu immediately embarked on a series of

`grasshopper` or `rolling strikes` which moved continuously from factory to factory. It had already prepared workers in different factories for this contingency through mass meetings of membership. In July for example, 2 000 GM, 2 000 Ford and about 5 000 Volkswagen workers had attended such a meeting to mobilise and plan after rejecting the employers' offer. On 15 July, Volkswagen members struck and gathered on the grass outside management offices. Immediately Ford and GM workers, who were striking for the first time in the history of the company, came out in a joint action which involved 22 000 people. They returned the next day to find they were all locked out, but continued to gather at factory gates every day in an attempt to report for work.[10]

Gradually employers permitted their re-entry and the rolling strikes continued. Volkswagen strikers returned on 22 July and immediately embarked on an intermittent go-slow which culminated in a standstill in production on 2 August. Management closed the plant and production ceased. GM workers returned on July 26 and embarked on a go-slow and refused to do overtime. Negotiations on August 5 yielded no result and GM members downed tools the following day returning four days later. By this time Ford workers were out on strike as they again demanded plant level wage negotiations. They returned on August 9 by which time GM workers were out, returning on August 10 and striking again on August 12. This cycle of strikes continued until August 19 during which time Volkswagen workers at the Roodekop plant in the Transvaal had banned overtime. The pressure was unceasing and by late August all three employers had opened plant negotiations.[11]

It was the first strategised industry-wide action over common demands in South African labour history. This was not the spontaneous action of the Volkswagen workers two years before. The union had retained tactical control throughout the dispute whilst mobilising some 13 000 workers over a lengthy period of time. It was a successful strategy which generally resulted in better settlements than employers were offering at the Council. As Kettledas recalls, "The only factory that didn't settle more or less on the same level,[as each other] was Ford because we were organizationally not strong at Ford, and because they were the last, and because there were difficulties within the company, short-time work and so on, people just settled at a lower level."[12] It was not the union's intention to persist with this plant bargaining strategy or to evolve an all-level bargaining strategy such as that adopted by Mawu. This was a temporary expedient to force employers to bargain in good faith over Naawu's demands and to cease their partnership with Yster en Staal. Naawu returned to Industrial Council negotiations and by November that year accepted Ameo's final offer of R2.60 with a further rise of 10 cents in February the following year.[13]

Friedman in his account of these strikes viewed them essentially as a failure, "The strike [sic] alarmed the white public and prompted the sharpest employer and white union backlash of the era.

Instead of urging workers back, employers showed they could do without them in a recession by closing their plants and refusing to re-open until Naawu promised that all would return."[14] Moreover, he claimed, Naawu had gained little in terms of the ultimate minimum wage settlement and "The strike showed that employers now held the whip hand in the factories ..."[15]. Hyman has pointed out that it is not uncommon for strikes to be more frequent in a period of recession particularly in the motor industry and cites the numerous strikes in Britain's car industry in 1970s to substantiate his point.[16] Naawu, too, viewed this dispute somewhat differently. It did not consider itself to be a passive victim of employer lock-outs but rather saw itself as adopting a strategy which enabled it to harness power by reverting to plant bargaining where their members could wield power through direct industrial action. The union stated, "Naawu's policy is to bargain wherever it is to our advantage... the union will bargain where it is most powerful. Sometimes this will be on Industrial Council level. Sometimes this will be at plant level . Sometimes at both levels... it will even withdraw from the Industrial Council where it appears that advantages that caused the union to originally sit on the Council have disappeared."[17] At this point in the early 1980s employers were committed to the centralised industrial council system as a way of limiting trade union power as previously described. The balance of power was still overwhelmingly in the employers' favour. Although their attitude to centralised bargaining would shift as Numsa became more powerful in the late 1980s, they were not at this stage prepared to jeopardise the existence of the Industrial Council. Former National Manpower Commission member Kate Jowell has pointed out that until the early 1980s employers and the state were the main supporters of centralised bargaining because it was a "useful method of minimising wage competition between companies" and could "neutralise unions, by weakening their plant base and causing them to focus more on maintaining benefit funds...than on grassroots organising."[18] Furthermore having witnessed the damage the union inflicted on the industry through its rolling strikes at plant level, employers, especially because of the recessionary environment, did not want to foster this trend. The recession as Friedman pointed out weakened the union's position but it also made employers more vulnerable.[19] Kettledas believes that it was from this juncture that they began to bargain seriously with Naawu on the Council and to acknowledge it as the majority union.[20]

Secondly, although the union publically announced that it had "reluctantly "[21] accepted the employers' final offer it had nevertheless forced up the minimum wage from Ameo's original offer of R2.15 to R2,70 an hour. Over the next few years through this steady process of attrition it would achieve the highest minima in South African industry. Finally, the union had considerable success in addressing the backlash from the conservative white public and business community who were reacting to a surge of black union militancy which was often distorted in adverse reporting in the press. Naawu countered this by waging its own propaganda war through carefully educating and informing the press. As Kettledas explained,

> We had the press against us and we had to work very hard to turn the propaganda around, which we did. We worked with two reporters, Sandra Smith of the *Evening Post* and Tim Barker of *The Herald*. We called them in and we said you are management reporters. You're not understanding the issues here. And we explained to them the issues, and they started reporting in a different way. They were more sympathetic, they were at strike meetings at 7 o'clock in the morning,... at General Motors the company'd lock the gates, so you'd have thousands of workers outside the gate. We'd arrange buses to take them from outside the gates to a community hall at 7 o'clock in the morning, and then we'd meet to report back our strategy, and bring the reporters in so that they'd understand what's going on, and that's how we changed the propaganda around. [22]

Over the next three years Naawu continued its drive to attain a living wage in which it succeeded in building a national campaign through worker education and a sustained publicity focus. Adler had been appointed Naawu National Education Secretary in 1983 and although often drawn into plant negotiations was nevertheless conducting a serious education programme. In the month of February 1986, for example, he reported on seminars in a wide range of companies on hours of work, shift work and health and safety and demands emanating from discussions, a seminar on childcare and the extension of maternity rights, basic shopsteward seminars, and the production of a shopstewards manual and model agreements. The production of *Naawu News* (although Adler mentions other union demands sometimes superseded its regular production) also contributed to the dissemination of education and information in the union.[23] By 1985 Naawu had succeeded in moving wages on the Industrial Council from R1 per hour in June 1980, to R2 by June 1982, to an average minimum wage of R2,73 in 1984, and to R3 per hour by 1985. This was a dramatic increase from the 15 cents an hour minimum for unskilled workers in 1967[24]and a considerable achievement in a time of deep recession in which the auto industry was badly affected. In 1984 it deadlocked with Epama (Eastern Province Auto Manufacturers Association) on the Council around its R3, 50 living wage demand for unskilled workers and negotiations continued into 1985. In consequence it returned to its plant bargaining/grasshopper strike tactic. This tactic entailed targeting the company where the union knew it could win the best wage settlement, in this case Mercedes Benz, and using this settlement as a benchmark for other employers to match. It moved from plant to plant negotiating whilst constantly applying pressure at the point of production through militant strikes. In April 1985, 3000 workers at Mercedes Benz in East London staged a strike and returned when management agreed to an across the board increase of 14c an hour for unskilled workers on the R 2,70 minimum, and 24c an hour for skilled workers backdated to February 1985. About 4000 Volkswagen workers followed on 19 April in a 12 day strike which ended when management matched the Mercedes' settlement. The action rolled on to General Motors where 3000 workers downed tools on 25 April , and onto Gemini, and Ford.[25] In this manner the union forced the minimum wage in the industry up to an unprecedented R3 per hour.

The auto industrial council minima were however confined to the Eastern Cape, whilst Naawu had a vision of negotiating a national wage standard and conditions of work across its sectors in all

parts of the country. It was a vision that it had sought to make a reality when it emerged as the first genuinely national industrial union in Fosatu and South Africa, having organised every motor assembly plant in the country by 1982 and a membership comprising 40 per cent of workers in the industry.[26] It was in the same year that the national executive committee took the historic decision to formulate a national minimum wage demand of R3.50 an hour to be submitted to every factory that it organised in auto assembly, tyre and rubber, and motor components. It would be some years into Naawu and Numsa's existence, however, before a conscious focus on a wage solidarity strategy would emerge. In the meantime Naawu was most successful in negotiating common demands across auto assembly companies. It was progressively extending its living wage demands across assembly factories in all parts of the country, both in companies party to the Eastern Cape Industrial Council, and through plant bargaining elsewhere in the country. In early 1985 for example, Toyota in the Transvaal won R3 an hour which was the highest minimum wage in the auto industry and the highest in the country. It gave 7 cents an hour more than the previous highest wage secured in other Fosatu affiliates, leading general secretary Fred Sauls to comment, "With Toyota's achievement, the union's national minimum [of R3,50 per hour] is not far off."[27] By 1986 the union had succeeded in raising wages to R3 an hour on the Eastern Cape auto industrial council and the union used this figure to benchmark demands elsewhere in the country where it was obliged to plant bargain. Transvaal companies such as Sigma Pretoria, negotiated a raise of R 2,45 to R3 an hour on this basis.[28]

Building power in tyre & rubber

As previously mentioned this thesis will not explore struggles in the auto sector in great depth owing to its limited membership in comparison to the auto assembly sector. Nevertheless it is useful to give an overview of developments in this sector as illustrate well how Naawu chose to conduct its struggles, and to augment its power, through engagement in centralized forums. The union's engagement on the Eastern Cape Motor Manufacturing Industrial Council reinforced its belief in the power of centralised forums to raise wages and working conditions across a sector. In consequence it turned its attention to gaining access to the Eastern Cape Industrial Council for the Tyre and Rubber Manufacturing Industry.

Numarwosa initially focused on the tyre sector in the early 1970s which was dominated by a limited number of large companies in different parts of the country. These were General Tyres, and Firestone in Port Elizabeth and Brits, Goodyear based in Uitenhage, and Dunlop in Durban. It would take ten years however before the union gained its first recognition agreement by which time it had penetrated deep into the sector and organised over 50 per cent of workers.[29] A regional Industrial Council for the Tyre and Rubber Manufacturing Industry existed for the Eastern Cape but before 1984 the union was not considered sufficiently representative to gain entry and it had to

fight some fierce recognition battles to be able to bargain wages and working conditions and to establish itself as a presence in the industry.

Elsewhere in the country, there was no industrial council for the sector in existence. As in the auto assembly sector, the union was obliged to fight for union recognition on a plant by plant basis. Workers at Firestone in Brits, for example, fought a major recognition battle in 1982. The factory fell in the industrial deconcentration area of Brits where poverty wages were the norm. Firestone workers were influenced by the determined stand of Mawu B&S members in a nearby factory. Naawu began organising Firestone in 1982 and by August 1983 had secured 74 per cent membership which according to the union was accompanied by "good leadership and well-disciplined members"[30] In the same month the company unilaterally granted a 5 per cent wage increase on the minimum (12 - 15c ph). Workers demanded a R1 increase to hike the hourly minimum to R2 and embarked on a three week strike in support of this demand. Within hours all factories where Naawu was organising in Brits refused to handle Firestone products, and Fosatu affiliates were requested to follow suit. Feeling the pressure, the company agreed to open talks and thereby granted workers their first round of plant based bargaining. In the course of negotiations it agreed to raise the hourly minimum to R2.[31] Soon after Brits members again struck around an assault by a foreman on a worker which resulted in the unusual step, at the time, of the company dismissing the foreman. The company thereafter agreed to open talks on the implementation of a recognition agreement. This was the beginning of a powerful worker presence in the company that would later lead to agreements that turned Firestone the auto industry's highest payer. Adler recalls, "We used to negotiate at the factory, and when we reached deadlock, between the time we reached deadlock and the time we reached the factory gate, the factory had stopped working. After that management insisted that all negotiations take place in a hotel in Brits!" [32]

By 1983 Naawu was recognised at Firestone in Port Elizabeth and Brits, and Goodyear in Uitenhage and by 1985 it had established itself as the most representative union in tyre and rubber. In the Eastern Cape in 1984, it was now impossible for employers to refuse the union's application into the Industrial Council despite attempts by Yster en Staal, the sole union on the Council, to block its membership. In like manner to developments on the Auto Council, it became the first black union to enjoy direct representation, and in its first negotiations its numerical weight displaced Yster and Staal's as the forum's major negotiating partner. It immediately embarked on improving poor wages in the industry and on extending its fight for a living wage. In its first set of negotiations it won long service leave for black workers for the first time, and hiked minimum wages from R1,38 to R2,15 an hour, an astonishing 53 per cent increase. Over the two year agreement workers were guaranteed minimum six monthly increases - a guaranteed 10 cents increase in February and August 1985 and again in February 1986.[33]

Naawu attempted to extend the tyre and rubber Eastern Cape Industrial Council agreement to the Transvaal and Natal but was refused. In consequence it used the Council agreement as a benchmark to extend equivalent conditions to other parts of the country which the Council did not cover, and successfully bargained similar conditions in separate negotiations in Firestone plants in Rosslyn and Brits, whose shopstewards attended Eastern Cape negotiations to familiarise themselves with the region's demands and arguments. Dunlop Tyres (formerly organised by Mawu), known for its anti-union stance, however doggedly refused either to benchmark its wages against the Council's or to support the establishment of a regional industrial council in Natal, despite union appeals to the Industrial Registrar. In consequence Dunlop's wages remained persistently lower than elsewhere in the country.

This mode of bargaining was typical of Naawu's highly economic manner of making gains and of utilising its limited resources. It put large amounts of energy into preparing and conducting Eastern Province auto industrial council negotiations and then utilised this agreement to pattern bargain in order to ensure that uneven conditions did not prevail in different parts of the country. [34] This applied in equal measure to co-operation with other Fosatu unions who organised in the sector, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union and Mawu, with whom they set up a joint co-ordinating committee for the rubber industry to standardise demands and conditions across the industry. [35]

3. Organising the components sector

Introduction

In the early 1970s Numarwosa became increasingly aware that it was not sufficient to organise the large auto assembly plants in the Eastern Cape. Strength in the auto industry meant simultaneous organisation in components manufacturing. If both sectors were organised, their combined strength would secure gains in standardising wages and working conditions and in the terrain of solidarity action in times of dispute. The union initially focused its attention on the organisation of the Tyre and Rubber industry. It was only in the early 1980s that it seriously turned its attention to organising other companies in the motor components sector. Although the components industry was never numerically large in terms of the union's total membership, in 1985 workers from this sector constituted 10 per cent of union membership with 1 951 members, and tyre and rubber constituted 12 per cent of its membership with 2 292 members,[36] it nevertheless expended considerable resources on this sector.

Building power at plant level

The National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi) covered this sector. The union applied to join in 1985 but received no reply not having sufficient national membership or

influence to be acknowledged. [37] The components industry consisted of five sectors which Nicmi agreements reflected in `chapters`. Micwu had the majority membership in all five chapters where it represented skilled coloured workers. Naawu had organised a minority of employees in Chapter Three which embraced motor component workers employed in large companies such as Dorbyl, Basaf, and Armstrong Hydraulics. Dissatisfied coloured journeymen (artisans) from these factories, noted Naawu's successful wage campaigns and defected in growing numbers from Micwu to join the union. Naawu's relationship with Micwu in the early eighties was "an arms length"[38] one in which Micwu accused it of poaching members whilst Naawu assured them that such defections were voluntary. According to Kettledas, coloured journeymen believed Micwu did not represent their interests on the Council as it seldom sought detailed mandates from them and they resented thirty employers unilaterally deciding what increases they should receive. It was on the basis of this dissatisfaction that Naawu made advances in the industry in the Eastern Cape.[39]

Lack of access to Nicmi meant that Naawu's Eastern Cape branch adopted a strategy that centred on plant level organisation and the winning of plant bargaining rights. The union was bound by the provisions of the Nicmi agreement on minimum wages which could not be challenged at plant level and which provided an entry wage for new recruits. It was not however prohibited from negotiating improvements on actual rates of pay for journeyman already earning above the minimums. In addition it was permitted to negotiate improved working conditions in areas not covered by the Industrial Council Main Agreement. It frequently succeeded in bargaining wages far in excess of Council rates, "sometimes fifty to a hundred per cent or more " observed Kettledas.[40]

After breaking into the assembly factories in the Transvaal, the Naawu branch also turned its attention to organising the components sector. Its membership profile was however different from the Eastern Cape as this embraced mainly African workers in the semi- and unskilled categories of work. Motor component companies were generally smaller and easier to organise than the large, complex assembly plants, but workers in these firms laboured under much worse conditions. A Naawu spokesperson in 1984 [41] reported, "Naawu's expansion into the components industry has uncovered a `can of worms` in which low wages, sexual exploitation, and terrible working conditions flourish. Naawu says the blame lies with those managements `out to make a quick profit.` ". The union vociferously attacked Nicmi, where they were refused access, for its neglect of these exploited workers and blamed its racist officials for being "... slow and reluctant to protect the interests of those who fund its expenses."[42]

Naawu was not alone among Fosatu unions in organizing this sector. In the Transvaal, Eastern Cape, and Natal, Mawu too was organising component companies, both large and small, in which mainly African semi-and unskilled workers were employed. Unlike Micwu, there was no tension

between the unions. This was in part because Naawu focused on the organisation of auto component factories which had a close relationship with assembly plants whilst Mawu organised components manufactured for other sectors of the economy. It was also partly the result of the close relationship that these unions had forged as affiliates of Fosatu and as participants in the IMF Southern Africa forum. Naawu, in the Transvaal, frequently assisted the overstretched Mawu in its organising attempts. Adler recounts,

> At that stage I was officially working for Naawu, but assisted quite a lot with Mawu in the early days when they didn't have capacity in Pretoria West, East, Rosslyn and Brits. The relationship was always collegial and supportive. Both unions were quite small then in the area, and we used Mawu offices in Brits, while they used our offices in Pretoria North and East. We used to help with pamphlet ting, attend meetings, solidarity assistance in strikes such as at B &S which was a Mawu factory. Actually we would co operate right throughout the country.[43]

One of the major thrusts for both of these unions in this sector was in response to unfair dismissals. All the unions' recognition negotiations involved fair grievance and disciplinary procedures. Naawu did not usually resort to legal action in such cases, preferring to use its knowledge of the law and industrial council mechanisms where possible to effect reinstatements. At times however it was forced into legal action against certain recalcitrant employers. In a case of dismissal in an illegal strike at CHT Manufacturing Company for example, the Industrial Court reinstated a hundred members on the grounds that workers could not be dismissed for striking over unfair overtime. In this case workers were labouring for over 60 hours a week. In another milestone case the Court reinstated Thomas Mabena from Pretoria Precision Casting on the grounds that he had been given no fair hearing before dismissal.[44] These cases, rare as they were, were strategically used by the union as a warning to other difficult employers. Both unions rapidly became enmeshed in disputes in companies such as Europlastic Foam, Z&D Engineering, and Paulstra, all in Rosslyn, and at Wayne Rubber in Isipingo near Durban. Over time, in the Transvaal, these component plants emerged as the backbone of these unions where, because of poor working conditions, membership was highly mobilised, disciplined, militant, and keen to take strategic action as a strike in 1983 at Autoplastics demonstrated.

The Autoplastics dispute is conspicuous for being Naawu, and South Africa's, first union co-ordinated, national company-wide strike. More than a thousand workers from three Autoplastics factories in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth downed tools after the company rejected Naawu's living wage demand of R3, 50 an hour in national negotiations claiming that their budget did not accommodate wage increases. Inflation was running at 12,3 percent that year.[45] A highly mobilised membership took the union by surprise. As Cape Town organiser, Andrew Wilson observed, "... the unity [of workers] had been a bit of a surprise as the union had only just recruited in the plant. But at the end of the strike everybody just flocked for membership cards."[46] Unlike the now fairly sophisticated employers in the auto assembly industry, components employers had not kept pace with prevailing developments in labour relations and at the Port

Elizabeth plant the local management called in the police during the stoppage. They found the union was one step ahead. Kettledas commented, "We told the manager that we were not happy with the police presence as there was no need for them, but his attitude was very negative. We then said we would like to speak to the company's head office in Pretoria. Shortly after this the police were removed from company premises."[47] The level of organisation in this co-ordinated strike alarmed the employers, especially as the cessation of supplies made it impossible for workers at Sigma Park to continue production and 2000 workers had to be sent home.[48] It quickly agreed to meet the union offering an 8 cents increase, "a substantial shift" said organiser Adler, "from nothing to 8 cents."[49]

Despite growing support from black workers in this industry both Mawu and Naawu were severely constrained by their inability to access Nicmi as their application to join was again refused in 1985. This was the Council on which the union desperately needed to have representation as Adler explained,

> It is not crucial that we use the Industrial Council in the motor [auto assembly] industry, because the industry is so concentrated that it's quite easy to get co-ordinated action. The opposite is true of the wide-spread components industry. It is impossible to organise all the small components plants, where employers tend to be 'pre-1976' types of employers. So rather than spend time battling for recognition, we gain improvements directly though the Council.[50]

The union was aware that should it gain access to the Council it would have to establish a much larger presence in the industry if it were to have the power to significantly raise minimum wages. This would entail the organisation of a considerably greater number of component companies which was a huge task. As the Acting Regional Secretary TC Nthite complained, "There are lots of negotiations especially in the Transvaal in recognition agreements, most of the factories are small and take a lot of time and also there are new factories. "[51] It was this set of circumstances that prompted the union to improve relations with Micwu especially as the union was rapidly shedding its previously conservative image, "Given their withdrawal from Tucsa," said Adler "their stand on the new constitution, their membership of the IMF, and the fact that we are discussing negotiating strategies, we are looking more to co-operation than competition with them."[52] For this industry, the significance of Micwu's merger with Mawu and Naawu into Numsa in 1987 was potentially great. Micwu's membership and status on the Council would give the numbers and influence that the other unions required, whilst Mawu and Naawu could provide the hardened militancy that Micwu had historically lacked in its complacent relationship with employers on the Council.

4. First year in Numsa: power in auto assembly, 1987

Introduction

By the time Naawu merged into Numsa it had raised wages sufficiently in auto assembly in the Eastern Cape to persuade employers of the logic of bargaining on actual wages earned by workers in the industry. In consequence, the Eastern Cape industrial council Main Agreement reflected firstly the minimum wage entry rate per grade which in reality was a means of benchmarking wages in the industry as few new workers were entering the sector. And secondly, an across the board percentage 'personal adjustment' increase which was calculated on each worker's actual hourly rate of pay. The union would demand that companies produce their pay-rolls in order to negotiate on actual rates of pay. Any benefits contributions in the worker's total wage package would also increase by the same percentage. It was on the basis of this bargaining formula that Numsa and employers came to a tacit understanding that wages in the Eastern Cape would be set by the Council, and there would be no further wage bargaining at plant level to improve on Council rates. Working conditions particular to different plants could however be negotiated at a local level providing companies adhered to the conditions laid down in the Main Agreement. It was this bargaining arrangement that came under severe scrutiny in an illegal strike conducted by Mercedes Benz SA (MBSA) workers in 1987. It was a strike that bore testimony to the extraordinary confidence and power that workers had built up in their relationship with employers over the previous six years and that their new giant union, Numsa, had bestowed on them.

1987 Mercedes Benz Strike

The 1987 Mercedes Benz strike followed in the wake of the launch of Numsa where delegates had adopted a strong living wage resolution.[53] Delegates returned to their factories more determined than ever before to win a satisfactory wage and Mercedes workers returning to their East London factory were no exception.

According to Kettledas the strike was one of the toughest and most significant that the union had waged despite being a plant based dispute it had direct implications for wage bargaining on the auto Industrial Council. Members at MBSA flouted the implicit understanding on wage bargaining at Council level because they believed that the company could afford considerably more than the rates agreed. According to Tom, "The IC established minima, there was nothing to stop a bigger increase at Mercedes - but management refused to bargain at plant level."[54] Although the union leadership was aware that this was a somewhat disingenuous argument it nevertheless did not intervene to stop the strike. It was sympathetic to memberships' intention to strike because, in addition to making good profits, until the end of 1988 the Mercedes management was "authoritarian, anti-union and racist."[55] At the end of the strike the union leadership hailed the resulting settlement as a victory and Numsa spokesperson Viwe Gxarisa stated that, "People have been fighting for a living wage, but Mercedes Benz workers are amongst those who can claim a victory."[56] A marathon trial of strength had taken place in which workers successfully hiked wages to unprecedented levels in the industry. Indignant employers responded by demanding an

agreement that henceforth rates settled upon at Industrial Council level would become actual rates of pay at plant level and a 'no strike' clause on wages agreed must be written into the Main Agreement.

In Numsa's first auto Industrial Council negotiations it succeeded in raising rates of pay to R 3.50 an hour. Membership at Mercedes felt however that the company was exploiting its position on the Industrial Council and could pay substantially more. They demanded a R5 an hour increase. The company responded by declaring firmly it was not willing to entertain further plant level discussions on wages and that the union was acting in bad faith to entertain re-opening wage bargaining. Workers were not convinced and embarked on an illegal wage strike which took both the company and strikers by surprise when it developed into a trial of strength dispute of nine week's duration which was unprecedented in the auto industry.[57]

The strike involved a tactic long employed by Naawu members and auto workers worldwide. It was a tactic which was dependent on the nature of the auto assembly production methods and which was not available, for example, to factories which Mawu organised. Members in a highly specialised section of the assembly line, such as the skilled paint shop, press shop, or body shop would stop production. The paint shop for example, constituted the final part of the production process and thus a worker stoppage would ricochet back down the line forcing the entire plant to come to a halt. This tactic allowed for rapid strike organisation and was sufficiently flexible to be employed in short demonstration stoppages or strikes of a more prolonged nature. In addition it had the advantage of protecting the bulk of less skilled, low paid workers on the assembly line, who could not be blamed for militant action executed by more skilled workers elsewhere on the line. This was the tactic employed in August 1987 by Mercedes workers. Although, seemingly spontaneous, it had in fact been the subject of careful planning a month in advance with workers in H plant, the body shop where production began. As Mtutuzeli Tom, a Mercedes shopsteward and later Numsa president, recalled, "We had second layer of leadership, the lieutenants, the `shock absorbers`. We called them on the week-end [before the strike] and we planned with them. Monday we all go back to the plant, preach the message in the canteen... workers said let's go out on strike."[58] The following day a section of the assembly line struck which effectively put a stop to the labour of a further 1 800 workers.

Over the following weeks Mercedes management employed a number of devices to avoid meeting workers' demands. To begin with it obtained a court interdict to force workers back to work on the grounds that the strike was illegal and fired 188 workers on this basis. The union successfully challenged the interdict on a technicality and the company were forced to open negotiations, but the union rejected its 'final offer'. The company then issued an ultimatum for the workers' immediate return to work. This was ignored by strikers which resulted in their mass dismissal.

"They dismissed the workforce twice," recalls Kettledas, "three thousand people, they dismissed them, we kept going back and saying we're not accepting this dismissal, we are negotiating here, we're gonna find a solution here. And we negotiated flat out, week in and week out for seven weeks."[59] Even though management steadfastly refused to meet union demands, it nevertheless indicated that it was open to talks and put forward a number of `final` offers whilst issuing no less than four deadlines to force an end to the strike. These deadlines the strikers defiantly ignored.[60]

Although union officials continued to negotiate throughout the strike period worker structures and leadership ensured high levels of unity, militancy and resolve. Mtutuzeli Tom, reflected on the crucial role played by shopstewards in a strike such as this where they had to both engage in, and stand back, from the action. It was a role that involved a tactical and flexible approach to negotiations; communication and education skills; the ability to observe and assess management and worker responses as well as to anticipate, prevent and intervene timeously; and finally, it required an exceptional level of honesty and trust between shopstewards and general membership:

> If you want to mobilise workers and you want to build strong organisation around a strike, make sure it is an issue that is common to all workers, an issue that is in their hearts and minds. When you build the strike action, explain the problems thoroughly to them, don't rush before the strike. You are going to see when they are ready. You are not going to tell them to go out on strike. They themselves are going to tell you...
>
> Don't close the doors on negotiations. If you close the doors you are unable to measure management's strength, you are unable to see what management is going to do. When you say you are at the end of the first session of negotiations, make a point of saying you are still open for negotiations. `You see you don't accept our position, we don't accept your position.` Don't do that. That's dangerous. You are giving them enough time to sit and plan. They can't plan if you engage them in negotiations.
>
> During the strike, after giving reports, we used to educate and explain things to workers. Members made sure that the strike did not end in the locker rooms. That it goes beyond the factory gates to the communities...
>
> The unity amongst workers was very important. After every day, shopstewards went to the union office. We analysed management's attitude and approach, and we also analysed members' level of organisation. We identified areas still lacking in the process. What is it that can be dangerous for this strike? For example, some workers found that this was a time to relax and enjoy themselves. The shopstewards would call them into a meeting, and say this is how we must behave so that outside forces cannot divide the strike action. You are supposed to be in the workplace for eight hours a day. Use those hours to talk to members and to spread the message of the correctness of the strike to the community outside. Everybody in a strike action is an activist. They must jealously guard that process of strike action, because members are sacrificing their salaries.
>
> Shopstewards must listen to members, about their families, some are under pressure from their wives. The worker says: `I cannot look after my child, go and pay accounts, telephone bills`. You as a shopsteward must listen and be prepared to engage those authorities. That is what we did. We engaged furniture shops, the post office, the municipality in terms of non-payment of rents, telephones, electricity. We told them: `We are not dismissed. We want to improve our wages so that we can pay.` If you succeed in winning the hearts and minds of members, you win a lot of members, non-union

> members, members in rival unions will join your union because you have done a good thing for them.
>
> The shopstewards committee was key in running the strike. The second layer of leadership is also key. While we were negotiating with management, the second layer of leadership had to give direction to workers. They kept the fire burning whilst we were out. [61]

Daily meetings on the company premises prevented the resumption of production, but in addition the location of these meetings played a strategic role in preventing the entry of scabs into the factory. They were initially held in a large space on the company premises dubbed `Geneva` by workers, but after their dismissal strikers moved to the lawns in front of the main administration block which prompted employers to erect a fence around the block. In response workers occupied an open parking lot in front of the entrance to the personnel department where new workers were employed and assembled. Strikers demonstrated an almost biblical sense of mission which was additionally fuelled by the climate of heightened political resistance in the country. Tom's description at the end of an exceptionally tense two weeks where no offers and no negotiations had transpired, gives a sense of the mood,

> I still remember coming out of the doors of the plant, after meeting with management. The workers were there in their thousands, sitting in the sun, some with umbrellas. As we appeared they started whistling, coming together, so that they were ready even before we reached the stage. It was dead quiet, they listened to every word, you could see in their eyes they were committed. If we had said at any stage that this is a waste of time, let`s go back to work, some of them would have fallen over dead. They were that committed.[62]

"It was Numsa everywhere, Numsa in every corner."[63] recounted Tom as the strike mobilised and educated Numsa and community members from factories and townships surrounding East London. This campaign was highly effective, and despite large scale unemployment and Mercedes' active recruitment drive through local newspapers, pamphlets scattered from light aircrafts over East London townships, and letters to dismissed strikers advising them to re-apply for their jobs, hardly a person applied for strikers' jobs.[64] High levels of unionisation, and political awareness and support for resistance politics in this region rendered strikers' appeals far more effective than in the 1984 BMW strike in Rosslyn, Transvaal, where Naawu was not effective in preventing scab labour.

International worker solidarity played a critical role in the resolution of the strike. This was a resource not available to the majority of workers in South Africa. Solidarity was extended chiefly through worker connections in IG Metall and the Daimler Benz in West Germany. It came in other forms as well such as through a solidarity visit of a German member of parliament, Willi Hoss from the Greens Party, to East London who addressed workers on the company premises in the full view and hearing of local management. The union also decided to send Kettledas to Germany

to pressurise and embarrass the German company and to solicit solidarity. Here he describes his visit,

> At the end of the seventh week, there was still no resolution. We thought that we were close ... but then the company just dug in. A human resources manager called Gardener, he just dug in and says `the bucket is empty.` So I then went to the office and I phoned Germany because we were in constant contact with the Germans, particularly after 1984 when we had this German 14 point code for labour relations conditions.[65] And they said the only way now is that you must get on the next flight and you must now take it up with the parent company. And that's how I just left East London on the next flight to Germany. So in Germany on the same day I arrived there I went straight to the IG Metall offices and had a series of press briefings and radio and TV interviews...
>
> I then went to address a rock concert of 5 000 people in a town called Essen, also talking about the problem in South Africa ....we went to the stadium and I was shivering from the fever, cold fever, and I was laying in the first aid room at the stadium, under a blanket, until I had to go and speak! So I was supposed to speak at around 8 o'clock, I eventually spoke at around quarter to ten... I eventually spoke and I felt I was Michael Jackson, because people were just shrieking in front of me, here, in front of the stage. And immediately from there... When I got into the hotel, when I undressed, I said: phew! I've just got this chicken pox.
>
> On the Monday I was supposed to go and address the whole factory at Kassel which is 26 000 workers, and Brian Fredericks had to go and stand in for me. We eventually then conducted negotiations three ways. I was in the hotel bed, Brian Fredericks and Schunk in the IG Metall office, and they were talking to the director of Daimler Benz. So they were negotiating, and then every time they had to check back with me, and report back to me... We actually then settled in a two-week period there ...
>
> It became very, very tense into the eighth week, when the company then wanted to bring in its scabs. They sent trucks out to the rural areas to pick up workers and bring them to the factory. We just made it so bad in Germany to say that, you know, blood - violence will start from that process, there's gonna be blood, and the blood will be on the hands of Mercedes Benz. And the Germans don't like that they must be associated with blood on their hands and stuff like that. So I think that immediately put pressure on the company in South Africa to stop their attempts to employ scabs. [66]

The company was in fact at breaking point. It was losing the production of 130 vehicles a day, and after the first four weeks of the strike was reflecting a R150 million loss of earnings.[67] After nine weeks, exhausted, penniless workers were equally eager to come to a settlement. These factors, combined with the international pressure exerted on the company, finally led to a settlement in which the union won a 42 per cent increase - inflation at the time was running at 18 per cent.[68] The lowest grade of worker was earning R2,35 an hour at the start of the strike and returned to R4,50 an hour. They returned with the highest wages in the auto industry. As Tom recalls, "We got huge backpay. I was able to install electricity at my father's home."[69]

The strike however had a significance beyond an immediate and dramatic pay increase. Firstly, Numsa had to deal with an irate management who accused the union of bad faith bargaining on the Industrial Council. The company now demanded that it be written into the Industrial Council agreement that no further negotiation on actual wages as laid down in the Main Agreement could

take place at company level. The loophole employed by Numsa during the strike that it had negotiated minima at the Council and it had merely gone to Mercedes on the basis of raising actual rates, was closed. Moreover, in an attempt to heal its relationship with the company, the union agreed to the addition of a 'no strike' clause on wages in the Main Agreement. Wages would henceforth be negotiated in one forum alone, the Industrial Council, and the rates agreed upon here would be the actual rates paid out in plants.[70]

The Mercedes strike symbolized a new era of confidence for workers in the industry. Here Tom describes some of the changes,

> The strike changed many things. Workers had unity, and confidence in their strength, their shopstewards and the union. Numsa became very powerful. Workers felt they could control the plant. Workers also developed a clear understanding of discipline. They saw that the organisation was not there to defend drinking or theft or fighting - you cannot use the militancy of workers to defend a drunken person... Management was very repressive. There was a lost of racism, insults, unfair discipline. Workers would simply down tools when this happened. [71]

This was a perception endorsed by management. Company chair, Christoph Kopke, in 1990 described it thus, "Worker control is not new to us, we have had a factory with workers' control since 1987. Supervisors used to clock in and then lock themselves in their offices for the whole day. They didn't dare go out on the assembly lines."[72] Mercedes human resources manager, Ian Russell, recalls that, "The stark reality was that a highly organised and politicised workforce with very skilled union leadership had in many respects taken control and did not accept that the management of the company had a legitimate role to play in determining its affairs."[73] This new confidence was visible across the auto industry. Membership began to take a greater responsibility for the protection and extension of their rights and reacted with alacrity to any abuse in the workplace. In addition, it began to take growing responsibility for co-workers' behaviour in the factory. In some cases the balance of power in the workplace changed so dramatically that employers struggled to assert their authority over the workforce.

5. Restructuring bargaining in Numsa 1988 -1989

Introduction

In order to raise industry restructuring issues successfully Numsa needed to ensure that it wielded sufficient power to force employers to engage in debate over workers' conditions and the future of the industry. This had to be effected at a national level where macro economic issues could be addressed with influential policy makers from large companies in the industry. The engineering sector of Numsa had successfully asserted a significant level of influence on the Industrial Council through the conduct of its 1988 strategic strike. The auto and metal sectors however, lagged behind in this regard. The auto industry, although wielding substantial power in individual companies and on the Eastern Cape Industrial Council, had not yet achieved a platform where it

could engage with employers across the industry nationally. Its bargaining forums were fragmented and there was no institution where broader issues could be raised. In the motor sector however, a national forum did exist but this ironically did not lend the union any substantial power to address industry-wide issues. The Industrial Council, Nicmi, was weak and different chapters of the Council varied in respect of levels of worker organisation and power within the metal industry and the economy as a whole. If Numsa was to address problems in the industry it needed to create viable national forums in both sectors where discussion could take place between unions and employers. As the general secretary to Numsa's first National Bargaining Conference put it, "We can't build socialism in one factory. So factory tribalism or sectionalism will definitely hold back our struggle . By bargaining at industry level, we can start to restructure the economy".[74]

Beyond that, the union was faced with the issue of uneven development and widely differing work conditions in each of its sectors. It aimed to establish common goals to which workers in the metal industry as a whole could aspire. While the auto assembly sector, for example, pioneered a level of wages unknown in the rest of the metal industry, the union was confronted with the problem of how to raise the wages and working conditions of workers in metal and engineering who were earning considerably below auto rates. The General Secretary expressed it in this way, " We can't win big victories unless we build Numsa and we build unity of the whole working class. Some members of Numsa have minimum wage of more than R6.per hour in their companies. Other Numsa members, for instance in the auto industry, earn less than R 80 per week. Some of our members in the homelands and the rural areas earn less than R30 a week.... Numsa is committed to raising the living standards of *all* its members."[75]

In Numsa, each industrial sector developed a National Industry Council (NIC) which elected a bargaining committee to conduct negotiations and implement national strategies and decisions within that sector. Thus co-ordination within sectors was being addressed, but the purpose of merging into a large metal union had been to uplift wages and working conditions across *all* sectors and not to strengthen communication within sectors alone.

Building the power to alter conditions across industrial sectors of uneven development was, however, no easy task. Each sector operated under different conditions, and had attained different levels of power in the industry depending on a range of factors such as workers level of skill; the position of the sector in the economy and its vulnerability to the recession; the existence of centralised bargaining forums either regionally or nationally constituted, or the complete absence of such forums; degrees of organisation and accessibility to organisation in the sector and so on. For workers all of these factors manifested themselves in different rates of pay, and differing work conditions. Numsa organiser, Alistair Smith, recalls the obstacles the new union faced,

> Suddenly you had different sectors now. All driven by different dynamics and at different stages of development. So this is very difficult to organise and sit down and start planning. So there was a big problem with planning, it was just all over the place... I think that sort of laid this sort of background for the move towards a new strategy... So '87,'88, was really the time of consolidating this office. It really was a kind of adolescent period. It was a very difficult time.[76]

The union was faced with the task of dealing with the specificity of the conditions in each sector whilst at the same time developing an overarching strategy that would encompass all its sectors in an attempt to raise conditions to similar levels. Furthermore, this had to unfold in a context where the union, its officials and membership, were faced with forging a common organisational and political identity without which the union could not broach the issue of solidarity across sectors. Again Smith remembers, on a practical level, the adjustments with which union officials were contending,

> The whole Mawu culture was now tempered by Naawu and Micwu influences. It presented a number of challenges. Firstly at a political level. Adjusting to the other comrades. Adjusting to probably a slightly more sophisticated unionism. A more bread and butter unionism. Adjusting to systematic administration, bureaucracy, which was very difficult for a lot of us. And then just adjusting to the fact that we now had new sectors and new responsibilities. So organisationally there was a change. I wasn't then just an engineering organiser, I now had to look after automotive workers in Brits as well as garage workers.[77]

Officials in the union, at all levels, came under different pressures. Debate arose about whether the union should utilise specialist organisers, say dedicated to the engineering sector alone, or `generalists` working across sectors. Initially the union opted for the concept of general organisers which immediately imposed a range of new demands on union officials, not least the breadth and depth of knowledge they needed to service such a wide range of industries. Smith recalled that as a national organiser the nature and scale of his workload substantially increased as he was obliged to liaise with regional secretaries and local organisers who experienced a range of problems in adjusting to the scope of their new job descriptions. He felt he was unable to assist them sufficiently and this was to the detriment of local organisation, "So there wasn't any kind of focus at local level, which I think was another major mistake because in the Mawu days, we could focus on longer term strategies at local level. I could actually sit down and target particular factories for education, for political work, the shebeen kind of meetings. You could think about how you were going to integrate national campaigns into your local."[78] It was evident that with growing size and complexity it was necessary for the union to adopt a different organisational shape.

One bargaining platform, one union

National Industry Councils were beginning to standardise demands and conditions within each sector but there was little co-ordination or solidarity across sectors. In early 1989 auto workers were earning R4,50 an hour, engineering workers R3 an hour. In the motor sector wages and conditions varied widely and workers were generally weak and badly organised. The union turned

its attention to the task of breaking out of sectoral divisions by drawing up, and popularising, common living wage demands across all sectors.

It was in this context that it had established its National Campaign Co-ordinating Committee (NCC) in 1988, which had played an important role in the 1988 engineering strike, to co-ordinate a range of national campaigns that the union was hitherto conducting in an haphazard fashion. The engineering strike had however, exposed a number of weaknesses in Numsa's campaign structures. In particular it was realised that its regional campaign structures were weak with the consequence that membership were not fully involved in its campaigns. As a result, in 1989 the NCC and Regional Shopsteward Councils endeavoured to integrate membership into campaigns and regional structures were strengthened through the appointment of a number of experienced regional organisers. By May 1989, despite the continued weaknesses in structures in certain regions, particularly in the motor sector, the general secretary was able to report that , "The NCC [National Campaigns Committee] has met twice during 1989. It is now beginning to function well, and the campaigns are starting to function properly."[79]

Ultimately, the carefully drawn lines of accountability and the resources that the union committed to its campaign structures had a dynamic effect on its ability to engage with both union and Cosatu campaigns and to mobilise unprecedented numbers of workers behind national issues. The building of campaign structures represented a decisive shift in the union's perspective where for the first time it was committing time and resources in a systematic way to issues of national concern. Frank Boshielo, an organiser from the Highveld Region, explained how national campaigns became popularised on the ground through the introduction of campaign structures,

> During campaigns we'd have a national meeting in Jo'burg and they'd explain the strategy behind that campaign and then we'd take a heap of pamphlets. I'd start at Ken Road, deliver pamphlets, then Witbank, Middelberg, then come back at one in the morning. If I wanted to write a letter to the company, I'd write and get it typed then take it to the shopsteward council and give it to the shopsteward and say give this to your manager, I didn't send them by post... Shopstewards were taught how to use a pamphlet.... In the shopsteward council you'd read the pamphlet, and explain and they'd do the same to the workers.[80]

The NCC embraced the Living Wage Campaign but there were complaints in the union that other campaigns were taking precedence over this critical area of union activity. These critics believed in the need to establish an additional forum which could unite all metal sectors in one bargaining platform where sectoral negotiating teams would receive their mandates. This concern resulted in the formation of the National Organising and Campaigns Committee (Nocc) in 1989 which consisted of four representatives from each National Industry Council bargaining committee as well as representatives from each region in each sector. The Nocc immediately organised the powerful National Bargaining Conference (NBC) and here the sectoral NICs separately discussed and drew up a set of core demands around a living wage, hours of work, overtime and so on. In a

plenary session all delegates formulated national demands, bargaining priorities, and guidelines for the Living Wage Campaign. This was again followed by sectoral meetings where industry specific demands were developed to add to the union's core demands. Utilising these distinct demands, each sector ran a campaign within their industry whilst national organisers became sectoral campaign organisers for either engineering, motor or auto. In the middle of the year the union held a second National Bargaining Conference to co-ordinate a national response and strategy to centralised negotiations which were underway. Between bargaining conferences continuity was ensured through Regional Shop Stewards Councils which liaised with the Nocc and allowed the union to assess the progress of negotiations, and to attend to organisational matters.[81]

Responses to the creation of Nocc, and its degrees of success, varied within the union. Some organisers, particularly in the engineering sector, were not convinced that it was possible to win common national demands across sectors which were at vastly different levels of development and differed substantially in nature. In addition they voiced concerns that the auto sector with its 20 000 members was dominating the Nocc bargaining agenda where the engineering sector represented 150 000 members. Nocc and NBC meetings were not easy to manage. Large differences existed in how sectors organised and fought their battles. In 1989, for example, auto workers were poised for industry-wide strike action, whilst the strategy in engineering was to settle through negotiations. Smith recalls this tension,

> In some of the Nocc meetings, we would always raise flack from the auto sector, Gavin [Hartford] and Les [Kettledas] who had a very militant approach. And there was always this discussion to get them to understand that the engineering industry was a very different animal, and driven by very different dynamics to the auto sector. It wasn't as cohesive as the auto sector, and the power balance was very different. But they would use this as an opportunity to knock us politically.
>
> In the auto sector you're talking about a fairly homogenous industry. It's easier to implement your strategy there... at the heart of it is the question around centralised bargaining and round wage solidarity. How do you deal with differentials between industries?
>
> We were getting around differentials between skilled and non-skilled workers, but you're faced with a very major problem where you've got different industries. There's always, for example, going to be differentials between the auto sector and the foundry industry. They're never going to be able to pay the same way - they are fundamentally different industries. And I think that's what comrades in the auto sector never really appreciated...[82]

There were others however who found this co-ordinating structure useful because of its role in focusing the union on bargaining issues. As a shopsteward from the Northern Transvaal recalled, "... with Nocc there were meetings... when they wanted to settle they would call a Nocc meeting and assess in terms of all the sectors, and the policy of the organisation, and make press conferences and statements, and go back to the structures and discuss those things - this helps."[83]

Kettledas felt that one of its major contributions was its success in bringing all collective agreements to a close in June of each year,

> Because we had different expiry dates of agreements, we tried to bring that together that they all expire in June. We achieved that to a large extent and we also tried - we had about 150 plant-level negotiations going on - to bring those into step with industry-level negotiations. So we are able to move uniformly in terms of the demands that we put to companies, and in terms of the expiry dates of agreements. So that we could rationalize our resources. So that you don't have a situation where you negotiate all year round, because you engage in industry-level negotiations, then you go to plant-level negotiations, and ... the agreements expire at different times. And that was largely caused as a result of when you gained recognition. [84]

Welding a National Bargaining Forum in Auto

Whatever the success of the Nocc, it was a useful forum for exchanging information around bargaining approaches. In the early days Naawu had been at the forefront of engagement with centralised bargaining strategies through their membership of the Eastern Cape Industrial Council. Mawu had looked to it as an example of how participation in such a structure need not entail the adoption of a non-participative, bureaucratic type of unionism. By 1989, however, the Auto sector was looking to imitate the Engineering sector's example of forging trade union dominance on a national industrial council. It embarked on a drive in accordance with both Numsa and Cosatu policy to build industry power through the creation of a single centralised bargaining forum in auto assembly.

In 1987 at a national bargaining workshop at Marianhill in Natal the auto sector had taken the decision to submit, and negotiate, common demands in all its bargaining forums. This was a successful strategy in that the union was steadily working towards a standardisation of wages and conditions across all assembly plants. Furthermore during the period between 1987 - 1989 it had successfully achieved synchronisation of its auto agreements across the country so that they all terminated on the 30 June every year. It continued however, to be a time-consuming and cumbersome way of conducting negotiations and by 1989 it determined to put an end to bargaining in separate institutions and to work towards the creation of a single national bargaining forum. Its strategy was to use its base on the Eastern Cape Industrial Council to move auto employers countrywide in Naamsa (National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of SA) into one forum where they would negotiate one set of wages and conditions for Numsa's 46 000[85] members in the auto assembly industry.[86]

The union sent out common bargaining submissions to auto employers countrywide and 'dictated the terms' under which these demands would be negotiated. Kettledas recalls how the `the terms` were articulated to employers, "On the 21st June 1989 in Port Elizabeth, at the MCI, the Chamber of Industries, and we expect you to send your representatives to that meeting to meet with us."[87] A

number of employers responded to the ultimatum including Sigma from the Transvaal because of the relationship the union had with Ford in Port Elizabeth, but Transvaal assemblers Toyota, Nissan, and AAD ignored the invitation although worker representatives from these factories participated. The union explained their intentions but a number of employers were reluctant to continue their participation believing that such a forum would concentrate too much power in the union's hands, and that in a highly competitive industry such a forum would reduce their competitive edge. However, as Kettledas put it, "They felt that they had no option."[88] Agreement was finally reached that a further meeting would be scheduled and pressure must be put on all assembly companies to attend.

Worker representatives from Toyota and Nissan returned to their managements to demand an explanation around their non-attendance, to which, according to Kettledas, management responded, "No, we're not gonna be dragged into this thing, we are conducting plant level negotiations, we're not interested in this."[89] Workers at both factories threatened to strike. Nissan members declared a dispute and proceeded to strike. Again Kettledas recalls, "They walked around with placards: 'Newbury, go to Port Elizabeth!' which is the chairman of the company. And we had to go to see him. I can remember walking into the meeting, the meeting was already in progress because our flight was delayed. So I was introduced to him by the organizer in the Northern Transvaal, and he refused to even shake my hand and said that there was no way that he was going to Port Elizabeth."[90] Numsa members throughout the country responded in like manner and staged demonstrations and work-stoppages to put pressure on Naamsa employers to persuade other assemblers to join the national bargaining forum.

Eventually most companies agreed to attend the scheduled meeting, saying, as Kettledas remembers, "Well, we came not because we're interested in this but we're just coming to see what is happening because our workers wanted us to be here."[91] This was the beginning, in 1989, of the National Bargaining Forum in the Automobile Industry (NBF), as it was officially titled. Agreement was reached to dissolve the provincial Eastern Cape Industrial Council. Ultimately only Delta Motors (formerly GM) refused to participate largely because worker action at this plant had not materialised owing to a weak union presence after the conducting of a disinvestment struggle, and defeat, in 1986 when it lost key leadership (see Chapter 13). The relatively painless and rapid conclusion to this campaign was testimony to union power in the industry where immediate worker action in factories determined their participation in this forum and where only when the union was weak were they unable to force the employer's hand. Ultimately the union aimed to establish a National Industrial Council which had legal powers under the LRA to bargain conditions across the industry and could thus bind employers such as Delta to implementing wages and conditions set by the Industrial Council. The NBF, as a private agreement between the union and employers, did not have these powers. Nevertheless the union viewed the forging of a

single national forum as a major advance. As Mbuyi Ngwenda, a Volkswagen shopsteward and later general secretary of Numsa, remarked, “The establishment of the NBF in `89 was a milestone because it entrenched the concept of national collective bargaining. It was a new concept and workers were beginning to talk about sector negotiations, we were creating a platform where we talked to the bosses in one platform.”[92] National organiser, Gavin Hartford, too commented that “No where else in the world at that time was an industry-wide negotiating forum in existence in the auto industry. It was an amazing achievement in such a competitive industry to force them into one forum.”[93]

The NBF proceeded to negotiate the 1989 agreement and to consider Numsa’s national demands which laid the basis for the elimination of differences in wages, and benefit packages across the industry. Demands included a 40 hour week and the granting of a living wage set at an across the board increase of R2 an hour, and a minimum rate of R6,58.[94]

The employers association rejected the wage demand and 13 000 auto workers, who were experiencing the power of industry-wide action for the first time, walked off the job in illegal strikes at Toyota, Samcor and Volkswagen in Transvaal, Natal and Eastern Cape. Toyota locked out 2 000 union members in the Eastern Cape, dismissed 3 600 workers in Natal and withdrew from negotiations. Volkswagen also threatened to withdraw. The strike was costing Samcor, Volkswagen and Toyota about 900 cars a day. Ultimately all workers were reinstated, negotiations continued and for the first time Numsa signed a national agreement giving auto workers a R1 across the board increase, and a minimum wage of R5, 50.[95]

In addition, the routine conducting of wage bargaining had established the NBF as a permanent institution in the minds of both employers and the union. In the same year, Numsa made a similar breakthrough in collective bargaining in the tyre industry. The union forged an agreement with the Eastern Cape Industrial Council for the tyre industry to extend its operations to all plants in the country which included Goodyear, Firestone, Dunlop, and General Tyres. It won May Day and June 16 as paid holidays and a wage increase of R1,30 across the board with a minimum starting rate of R5,28 an hour.[96] Only Dunlop Tyres in Natal refused to participate in the forum. It nevertheless fell under the geographic scope of the Council and was thus obliged to implement wages and working conditions set by this bargaining forum.[97]

By 1989 with the formation of the NBF, Numsa had achieved national centralised bargaining in all of its industries. It had secured a level of ‘institutional power’ which endowed it with the capacity, in Macun’s definition, to participate in, and shape rules and regulations in areas such as industrial relations legislation, collective bargaining arrangements and institutions, and in the political

process. It was poised to wield considerable power in the dawning decade of the 1990s that was to bring substantial changes to the South African labour, political and socio-economic landscape.

6. Conclusion

The unions that organised the auto industry approached the building of power in a different manner from Mawu and this was, as previously explored, a reflection of their different lineages. Whereas Mawu approached its entry into the industrial council with considerable caution, Numarwosa/Naawu saw the power of an institution that lent itself to industry-wide organisation.

In the early 1980s the auto unions focused on making gains on the Eastern Cape Industrial Council for the Auto Manufacturing Industry where they rapidly gained dominance on this conservative body through strategic use of industrial action exemplified by the 1982 rolling strikes. This highly strategised mode of operating sharply contrasted with the spontaneous strikes that it was confronted with in 1980 at Volkswagen. The union's adoption of a limited number of issues which evolved into campaigns around a living wage, parental rights, hours of work, retrenchment rights, and worker public holidays, gave their bargaining strategy a focus around which the union and membership were able to organise with considerable success. Its successful engagement on the auto industrial council was replicated on its admission to the Eastern Cape Industrial Council for the Tyre and Rubber Manufacturing Industry Eastern Cape which was later extended to cover tyre manufacturers in all parts of the country.

With the launch of Numsa, Naawu's industrial sectors were separated into different bargaining units. The assembly, tyre and rubber industries constituted the auto sector; whilst component factories covered by Nicmi fell under the Motor sector. The new union aimed to build national industrial power within and across all its sectors in an attempt to achieve parity in wages and working conditions across the metal industry. To achieve this goal it was necessary to build national centralised bargaining forums in each of its industries where employers could be engaged on issues affecting the entire industry. In addition, to achieve a commonality of approach to bargaining issues within each sector, it established National Industry Councils. Moreover, its strategy entailed the development of a set of core demands which could be negotiated in each national bargaining forum. In order to achieve this it launched the National Organising and Campaigns Committee (Nocc) and National Bargaining Conference to draw up common demands and to monitor the progress of negotiations in all sectors. The launch of the National Campaigns Committee which replicated structures on all levels of union organisation was the vehicle through which these demands were communicated and popularised amongst membership.

The changes in the new union's approach to bargaining led the auto sector to focus on the issue of building national power in its sector. The thrust in Numsa towards national centralised bargaining

in order to build power across the industries it organised and in an attempt more systematically to address issues of job losses, focused the auto sector on strategies to achieve an appropriate national bargaining forum. In this it succeeded when in 1989, through co-ordinated industrial action across assembly plants, it achieved the formation of the National Bargaining Forum in Auto.

The union, having established national bargaining forums in all its sectors where in some it wielded considerable power, and supported by internal national bargaining and campaign structures, was now poised to shape working conditions within its industry. In Macun's definition of trade union power it had attained significant degrees of power in the three critical areas of working class power, organisational power, and institutional power. It was now, for the first time, in a position to engage employers in discussion around working conditions across the industry and around structural problems in its industries which it believed were in part responsible for job losses and low levels of productivity.

ENDNOTES

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[57] Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[58]. Interview Mtutuzeli Tom, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[59]. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[60] Ibid.
[61]. Interview Mtutuzeli Tom, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[62]. *South African Labour Bulletin* "A decade of Struggle at Mercedes" Vol 15, No 4, 1990.
[63]. Ibid.
[64] Interview Mtutuzeli Tom, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[65] Kettledas is here confusing the 14 point code drawn up by a number of German companies in 1989 (discussed in a later chapter) with the provisions of the European Community's Code of Conduct in South Africa which was released in July 1977. Its main clauses recommended trade union recognition, a minimum wage 50 percent above the minimum needed to satisfy basic needs, and an end to segregation in the workplace. It was operative at the time of the 1987 strike. Mercedes was paying below the recommended minimum wage stipulated in the EC Code. (Holland, M "Disinvestment, Sanctions, and the European Community's Code of Conduct in South Africa" in African Affairs Vol 88, No 353, October 1989.)
[66]. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[67]. South African Labour Bulletin "Mercedes Benz" Franz Kruger Vol 13 No 1 Nov 1987.
[68]. Ibid.
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Chapter 6

Wages, unemployment, and restructuring
Auto negotiations 1990 -1992

1. Introduction

The early 1990s were to usher in profound changes to South African politics which would deeply influence Numsa policy, not least its bargaining platform. The decade opened with Nationalist Party President de Klerk unbanning the previously outlawed ANC, SACP, and PAC. The release of political prisoners including Nelson Mandela followed soon after. These actions released a burst of political activity and uncertainty and initiated a period of mass action which included marches, and demonstrations alongside the opening of political and constitutional negotiations. This period of upheaval ended with South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994 when the ANC won 63 per cent of the vote and a Government of National Unity led by the ANC was formed together with three other political parties who received more than 5 per cent of the vote respectively.

Simultaneously, an internecine war which had erupted in the Natal region in 1987 between the Kwa Zulu Bantustan cultural organisation, Inkatha led by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and the UDF and Cosatu representing progressive forces, intensified dramatically. Political contestation was further fuelled by an Inkatha recruitment drive in 1990. In the same year the Natal violence spread to the industrial heartland of the Transvaal chiefly to the Witwatersrand, Pretoria and the Vaal (explored later). Cosatu, which had moved into an alliance with the ANC, was a clear target for the violence and despite initiating repeated peace attempts, in August and September alone, over 1 000 people lost their lives many of them Cosatu members.[1]

The unbanning of the liberation movements led to a period of negotiated transition to democracy which ushered in radical changes in the Cosatu unions' organisational, bargaining, and political environments. The transformation was profound in its implications. In Von Holdt's analysis it constituted a 'triple transition' involving "a transition from a despotic order to democracy, from a closed, economy to one exposed to the forces of globalisation, and from apartheid to a post-colonial society"[2] After years of isolation, South Africa, was entering a period of economic liberalisation where it would now attempt to integrate itself into the global economy whilst simultaneously undergoing a process of decolonisation involving new class formations and a process of reconstruction. Cosatu, and its affiliate Numsa, responded by defining a new strategic

vision and role in this transitional society. This role embraced the goal of reconstructing the society and the economy in co-operation with other partners in a Tripartite Alliance it had entered into with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC.

Both Cosatu and Numsa entered uncharted terrain when confronted by this shift "from resistance to reconstruction"[3] which involved building relationships with both employers and the Nationalist Government. Negotiating forums proliferated to which business and/or government were party. In 1990, for example, Cosatu entered the government's National Manpower Commission, a tripartite (business, labour, government) institution in order to negotiate labour market policy. In 1992 it participated in the establishment of the National Economic Forum (NEF) following a Cosatu stayaway which protested the introduction of VAT and demanded a tripartite forum in which to negotiate economic policy. In 1993 Cosatu, strongly supported by Numsa, unveiled the concept of the Reconstruction and Development Programme which ultimately became the ANC's electoral manifesto. Such participation in high level national and regional negotiations thrust Cosatu and its unions into new arenas of policy making as they aspired to influence the shape of a future economy and on the way South Africa's wealth would be redistributed. This new emphasis on forging policy in civic, economic, and labour areas was directly to affect Numsa and, was indeed, often initiated by the union.

The other major factor to influence Numsa's bargaining direction was the continued downward spiral of the economy. Chapter Three offered an account of the recession that beset the South African economy throughout the 1980s. In the early 1990s this recession deepened and mass unemployment had become a permanent feature of the economy. Numsa's industrial sectors continued to fall victim to this economic decline. Thus parallel to Numsa's living wage campaign there unfolded an intensified campaign to protect and create sustainable jobs. This was, in the main, attended by less success.

It was against this background that the metal unions organised throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. Behind Numsa and its predecessor's astonishing growth and militant victories lay the spectre of retrenchment and their interventions in this arena, although important in the lives of individual members, were mainly defensive in nature. The living wage campaign which they initiated in the same period was not however, unrelated to the huge growth in unemployment. The unions argued that the payment of a decent living wage was more urgent than ever before because working people were obliged to support many more family members and thus the imperative to raise wages was greater. A survey conducted by Bhorat and Leibbrandt a decade later in 1996 and used in a National Economic Development and Labour Council's (Nedlac) labour caucus, corroborated the assertions of these unions at the time, "It is the employed which provide the social

security net for the unemployed...Given the absence of a publicly funded welfare net in South Africa, workers provide accommodation, food and other help to the unemployed family members."[4] There is no reason to believe that the situation was much different in the eighties taking into account Jaffee's research, the non-existence of any social security net, and the state of the economy.[5] For much of the 1980s, as previous chapters have explored, the unions were unable to engage employers on the question of restructuring their industries in order to expand their productive output and to put an end to unrelenting job losses. It boiled down to a question of power. Whilst they had limited power or influence in national forums they could not engage employers on broader issues that affected their industries. By 1988 however, both the auto and engineering sectors of Numsa were beginning to wield this power and could turn their attention to engaging employers on questions of broader economic issues and industry restructuring.

By 1989 Numsa had built power on a number of different levels. It had acquired sufficient institutional power to embark on shaping the rules and protocols that governed Nicisemi negotiations in engineering and the NBF negotiations in auto. It had won, in Wright's definition of institutional power, the power to define what it wanted and by so doing to place certain issues on the table, and to exclude others.[6] It had acquired a significant union density in the industry, greatly improved levels of bureaucratic power, combined with the potential to develop high levels of unity and cohesion within its constituency. It had achieved, too, significant levels of `working class power`[7] in the sense that it had welded together a diverse membership in a racially divided society where only the white working class aristocracy had not been accessed. The question was now how would Numsa extend its power and influence into crucial political and labour institutions in the transitional context of the early 1990s? How would it maintain a degree of autonomy from the responsibilities it now bore for the continued existence of these institutions it was entering? How would it overcome working-class cleavages in the face of escalating unemployment and other actual and potential racial cleavages that existed in its sector? And how would it assert working class interests and influence in the new society that was being moulded? The following chapters describe and evaluate Numsa's attempts at achieving these goals in the period 1989 - 1995.

In the early 1990s the union turned its attention to new ways of accessing power for its membership and for the working class more generally. It focussed on developing policies and strategies which would restructure the faltering economy in the context of a new democratic dispensation. In these attempts to formulate new economic and industrial strategies Numsa emerged as a pioneering union. This shift in the union's focus has been variously described as a shift from the "politics of resistance" to the "politics of reconstruction" in the trade union movement.[8] It has also been termed a process of `radical reform` whereby "labour combined a radical vision of a future society with a reformist, incrementalist strategy"[9] Numsa aimed to play a

pre-emptive and proactive role in restructuring a new society in an approach which has been labelled 'strategic unionism'[10] as it was developed in the Australian labour movement in the previous decade. This approach involved concepts of co-operation and co-determination between labour, business and government and a radical reinvention of bargaining agendas. This evolution is explored in the following chapters which will investigate progress in different sectors whilst simultaneously mapping out shifts in policy that would have impact on all sectors of the union. This chapter examines developments in the auto sector.

Despite the competitive edge that existed between the engineering and auto sectors in the union it is possible to chart similar approaches and gains made in these sectors in the period 1990 - 1992 and to discern influences in bargaining tactics between these sectors. This was obviously the intention behind the creation of the NOCC and the National Bargaining Conferences where an exchange of both information and approaches took place. Both sectors in this period combined the traditional adversarial approach to bargaining wages with a more consensual approach on non-wage issues. This allowed them to make gains in the area of workers' rights including women and parental rights, hiring and retrenchment procedures, work hours, training, and grading. Increased wages however still emerged as the major preoccupation in industrial disputes.

Both auto and engineering were confronted with the conundrum of how to raise the wages of their low paid membership whilst ensuring that higher paid workers were not alienated from the union through a lack of corresponding gain. Both sectors employed the strategy of addressing unemployment and low wages through a focus on training, and the compression of grades in order to narrow the apartheid wage gap between the lowest paid and the artisanal level. They initiated thereby a bargaining focus which would ultimately, through the adoption of an Australian model, lead to the union integrating these elements into a new three year bargaining programme in 1993. What becomes evident however in this period is that the union's bargaining priorities which laid the basis for their new strategy were in Smith's words 'a natural development'.[11] This was later forgotten when the leadership was frequently accused of importing an inappropriate Australian model which could not succeed in a South African environment.

Both sectors confronted the challenge of how to negotiate increasingly complex and technical issues whilst continuing to maintain membership support. Both national bargaining forums established sub-committees to discuss more long-term technical demands where they solicited broad mandates from general membership. In this they faced the paradox of bargaining to improve members' conditions whilst simultaneously distancing them from issues under discussion. The singular focus on wages by membership and the consequent industrial action was the result. Leadership in these sectors were thus constrained in their aspirations to progress to a more discursive, broad-ranging and consensual style of negotiations. This was most obviously

experienced in the larger and more diverse engineering sector, but was also felt in the more homogeneous auto sector.

The auto sector by virtue of its size, homogeneity, and uniformly higher skill base was however more successful in pursuing many of its goals. Its industry wide strike in 1991, for example, secured not only higher wages but also a moratorium on retrenchments across the industry, something the engineering sector was unable to achieve. In contrast the industry-wide strike in engineering in 1992 precipitated a crisis for the union. This did not mean however that the auto sector was not ultimately also confronted with similar restructuring issues to engineering. By the end of 1989 Numsa's auto sector had successfully forged a National Bargaining Forum where it had achieved the power to shape the rules governing collective bargaining arrangements. It was poised to take control of the industry and to engage in national action.

At Numsa's National Bargaining Conference in February 1990 where, for the first time, all sectors of the union united to draw up common demands and strategies, the union committed itself to bargaining at industry level in order to start the process of restructuring the economy. It was in this context that the Conference proceeded to define its primary focus in all sectors as being that of job security, training and job creation.[12] It was these demands coupled with the sentiments expressed by the President in his first 1989 NBC speech that was to guide the auto sector in its approach to bargaining in the next few years,

> We are facing many deviations in this struggle for liberation from exploitation. Many of these dangers come from inside ourselves.
>
> The first danger is economism. Instead of seeing our collective bargaining as part of our struggle for an end to exploitation, we see it only as a way to get more money... we think only about our short term aims, and we forget our long term aims... we forget about our national campaigns and about union and working class solidarity and think only about money. Remember - even if you do get a good increase, the capitalists will take it away through rising prices and higher unemployment.
>
> One other danger, which is closely linked to economism is SECTIONALISM. I call this FACTORY TRIBALISM. It means that workers in one factory think only of themselves. They are not interested in the rest of the union, or in the rest of the working class... You can win some things in your own factory. But you can't win big improvements there. .. We can't win big victories unless we build Numsa and build the unity of the whole working class.[13]

In 1990 the auto sector would face a revolt at Mercedes Benz which would force it to grapple with its rejection of `factory tribalism`, and it would also express a remarkable commitment to the concept of worker solidarity with other sectors of the union in its 1990 negotiations. It would, in similar manner to the engineering sector, employ its newly established bargaining forum to wage national struggles which would result in considerable advances around non-wage issues. It would simultaneously continue to successfully advance an adequate living wage in the industry. The 1992

negotiations would however usher in a more sober bargaining environment as employers continued to reassert their control and, despite the union winning some significant rights, it was confronted with serious structural problems in the industry which held many dangers for its membership. This chapter explores these successes and constraints. The crisis in both the engineering and auto industries would lead the union to critically revise its bargaining strategies. A later chapter will investigate the evolution of these new strategies.

2. Progress and revolt in auto: 1990

Background: unemployment and union strategies in auto in the 1980s

As the decade of the 1980s progressed, the auto industry, like engineering, fell victim to escalating redundancies. Both these industries were depressed by South Africa's generally ailing economy but as in the case of the engineering sector explored earlier, there were industry specific factors which contributed to the decline of the auto sector.

Naawu had been confronted with its first major lay-offs early in the 1980s. In 1982 Sigma in Pretoria decided to rationalise its production, not in response to economic conditions, but through the introduction of new technology and the contracting out of some processes to other companies. This led to the retrenchment of 800 workers. Naawu urged the company to introduce a shorter working week as a means of retaining workers but Sigma refused. Fortunately, the union had signed a recognition agreement which provided some retrenchment rights, which although limited, did require the company to discuss layoffs with the union. This allowed it to negotiate severance pay which the company had not intended to provide. Sigma also agreed to assist workers in accessing immediate UIF benefits and in finding alternative employment.[14]

This experience alerted the union to the necessity of developing policies and strategies around job loss. It declared, "Agreements need to be made to buttress workers against the financial risk of working in this industry, and decent severance pay arrangements need to be made."[15] It embarked on the negotiation of retrenchment and severance agreements in every plant where it was recognised and developed a set of principles to guide organisers in negotiations. At industry level it proposed the negotiation of a set of standards to deal with redundancies. These policies were soon to be adopted as standard demands by unions around the country which were equally afflicted. Naawu's first demand was that employers timeously alert the union to the possibility of retrenchments and allow for a thorough process of consultation to assess whether such lay-offs could be prevented. Secondly, it put forward the proposal of a shorter working week, and the cessation of overtime as a means of preserving jobs. If such arrangements proved impossible, the union demanded the negotiation of an adequate severance package where severance pay would be calculated as one month's payment for every year of service. It proposed the use of the `last in,

first out` principle as a way of determining which workers should be retrenched in what particular order. Embedded in this proposal was the additional motive of preventing companies from using the retrenchment process to divest itself of union activists.

Internally Naawu launched a union retrenchment benefit fund to assist retrenchees with the small, but for some crucial, R25 a week payout for up to six months. In 1984 it paid out R300 000 in such benefits. Fellow workers also showed a significant solidarity around lay-offs. When the union managed to reduce retrenchments at General Motors from 580 workers to 461, those workers who retained their jobs agreed to donate R2 per week of their wages to assist retrenchees and in this way raised R 4000 a week. Gloria Barry, Naawu's Port Elizabeth Area Secretary explained, "The workers felt that those who get a fuller pay packet should give to those who were not."[16]

In the same year as the Sigma lay-offs, the battle against retrenchment shifted to Port Elizabeth. Volkswagen management informed Naawu of the need to retrench and thereafter, in negotiations, refused to entertain alternative ways of dealing with the issue. Whilst negotiations were still underway the company issued 316 workers with retrenchment notices. Volkswagen branch chair and full-time shopsteward, John Gomomo, commented, "The worst thing about the whole situation was to see people with clean records being retrenched... Their fear was that if workers with clean records were affected, nobody was safe. To the workers, this was not retrenchment but a strategy to break the union."[17] Workers responded by downing tools and at a general meeting, 4 000 strikers demanded that employees with clean service records be reinstated immediately, whilst the remaining retrenchees should receive adequate severance pay and should be the first in line for any future employment in Volkswagen. The company eventually agreed to these terms.[18]

When Volkswagen decided to retrench 900 workers in March the following year, the company was more receptive to union suggestions. Gomomo immediately told the company to look for alternatives, "We told the company straight we don't believe in retrenchment. We told the company that to retrench that number of people would only add to high unemployment...after all they are not the ones who suffer during a recession, it's the workers who are always the losers."[19] After more than a month of intensive negotiations, the company agreed to lay off only 183 workers and to give them priority in any future employment needs the company may have.[20]

It was a sequence of large-scale retrenchments at Ford Motors in 1985, however, that demonstrated to the union that retrenchments in the auto industry could no longer be dealt with through retrenchment clauses in recognition agreements and that a more radical solution was needed. At the beginning of 1985 Ford announced a merger with the Anglo-American owned Amcar to form the South African Motor Corporation (Samcor). Ford had always been reluctant to involve the union in matters that it considered to be management's prerogative and thus Naawu learnt of the

merger which would involve largescale lay-offs, the day before Ford made it public. As Kettledas acerbically commented, “But now we learn that negotiations (between Anglo and Ford) have been going on for a whole year... What Ford does not seem to realise is that it will not be 2 000 employees out of work, but 2 000 families living without an income.”[21]

The merger was followed at the end of that year by Ford closing down their Port Elizabeth Neave and Truck plants without consultation with the union. Now 2 000 mainly Naawu members who laboured in the assembly of Escourts, Granadas, Cargo trucks, tractors and Bantams were threatened with the loss of their jobs. Naawu expressed dismay at the multinational’s indifference to the welfare of workers and their communities in countries where they made their profits. A Ford worker with 32 years service bitterly commented, “Now, that I am finished, I am thrown on the rubbish heap.”[22] The company had made its largest profit ever of over three billion dollars in 1984 which was considerably in excess of net earnings in 1983 of 1,87 billion dollars.[23] Ford chairman, Phillip Caldwell, described it as “...the best year in the history of the company by just about any measure you can think of.”[24] The union found itself powerless to effect any alternatives to the company’s arbitrary actions, because as Sauls expressed it, “The only time they wanted to talk to us was when the announcement of the merger had already been made. We couldn’t mobilise around the issue.”[25] Soon after, Ford closed their Sierra plant of about 900 workers. The Sierra plant (previously Cortina) at Struandale was Macwusa’s stronghold and constituted about one third of its membership in the Eastern Cape.

Both Naawu and Macwusa workers were angered by Ford’s cavalier attitude to divesting themselves of their employees and moving its remaining operations to Pretoria. Freddie Mosquin, a Ford worker with 28 years of service, commented, “The company has deliberately denied us the right to have a say and express our views on our future and that of our children. We are nothing to Ford. Their machines are more precious to them than we who are flesh and blood and living beings.”[26] Workers felt that much of the necessity for such large-scale retrenchment was located in mismanagement, “If Mercedes Benz can remain profitable in East London, then what is Ford’s problem?”[27] asked one worker.

Ultimately, the two unions managed to negotiate a reasonable retrenchment package. Workers received 50 per cent of their earnings for a period of 12 - 18 months depending on their length of service. Part of the retrenchment agreement was that the company donate R 50 000 to the Port Elizabeth School Feeding Fund, “to ensure that scholars who go to school without enough money to eat as a result of their parents being unemployed will have something to eat.”[28] In addition, Ford instituted a training programme for workers wanting new skills, a free medical service, a centre to help retrenchees find other jobs, and an opportunity to buy vehicles at reduced prices.[29] Nothing however could compensate for the fact that ultimately it was not only Ford’s 2000

workers who lost jobs but nearly 5 000 workers because many small companies in the components sector were dependent on Ford's operations. As a Macwusa shop steward, Sipho Dubase, explained, "The future here is very bleak. When Ford leaves, many of the small engineering firms, the tyre companies, the windshield makers and the headlamp makers are definitely going to close down. Other industries will also be affected, like furniture and consumer goods and these workers are going to lose their jobs. People here no longer talk about the scarcity of jobs but the non-existence of jobs."[30] The Ford closures opened a deep wound in the Port Elizabeth community where unemployment was estimated to have reached 56 per cent and, where many people subsisted in deep poverty. At Port Elizabeth's Livingstone Hospital, for example, 41 per cent of children under the age of five admitted to the hospital were underdeveloped due to inadequate nutrition. Local newspapers ran headlines such as `Desperate Plight of PE Starving` and `How do you cope when the City of Promise becomes the City of Despair`.[31]

Putting aside Ford's largely indifferent, and at times blatantly dishonest manner of effecting retrenchments, what can be said of workers' allegations that retrenchments were due to the company's mismanagement of its operations? Ford's response to these allegations was that by merging with Anglo American and moving its operations to the Transvaal it was in fact making a decision in the best interests of preserving its operations in an increasingly precarious environment. It is possible that if it had dealt with the union in a more transparent manner around the merger they might have found better solutions to the closures in Port Elizabeth and they may have reduced the number of job losses. However, both Naawu and Ford were in fact dealing with deeper structural problems in the auto industry.

By 1985 the auto sector in South Africa had emerged as the largest vehicle market on the African continent. Of the 10 million vehicles registered in Africa two-thirds were in South Africa. It had undergone sustained growth from 1963 when 15 800 workers produced 148 000 vehicles to 1983 when about 150 000 workers were producing 405 810 vehicles. In the course of 20 years the workforce had grown by 175 per cent. Multinational auto companies had also hoped that South Africa would act as a springboard for selling vehicles to the rest of Africa. This however was thwarted by the antagonism to apartheid and the refusal of most African countries to import South African produced cars and trucks. By 1974, 14 assembly companies were operating in South Africa and offering a choice of 40 models of cars to the South African market.[32] The number of models and car manufacturers was unprecedentally large compared to the rest of the world and gradually manufacturers came to realise that the vehicle market with its small white monied population (most black South Africans were too poor to purchase vehicles) was overcrowded. The world recession in the early 1980s exacerbated their problems. *The Star* reported that "The embattled motor industry has slashed production by a third as pressure for rationalisation among the giants grows."[33] Sigma Corporation, for example, (which changed its name to Amcar in July

1984), recorded losses of R 69,1 million in 1983 and by June 1984 they recorded borrowings of R300 million which entailed finance charges of about R60 million per year. It needed to sell 5 000 cars a month to repay this sum which it was unable to do as July car sales dropped by 38 per cent. As the world recession abated Sigma's August losses lessened but it continued to experience losses of over R25 million a month for the remainder of that year.[34]

Streamlining marketing and productivity through such mechanisms as mechanisation and robotisation was not enough to deal with the scale of the crisis. Indeed, from Naawu's point of view, they only increased lay-offs. Over the next few years, a number of auto companies either left South Africa or merged their operations. A gradual concentration into fewer hands took place. In September 1985, for example, the Italian company Alfa Romeo in Brits announced it was withdrawing from South Africa without previously alerting the union to the possibility, although workers had noticed the company was not importing more stocks. Moshe Mahlaela, chair of the shopstewards committee, commented, "It seemed clear then that the company was trying to get out without any compensation for workers."[35] Workers immediately struck and the company equally promptly dismissed them. After pressure from various international labour organisations, including the IMF, the Italian Metalworkers Unions, and the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Alfa finally agreed to negotiate a settlement which included paying out workers for full leave, notice pay, severance pay, bonus and long service awards, company and worker pension fund contributions, and payment into medical and burial schemes until the end of the year.

It was against this background that Ford took the decision to merge with Anglo American. Mergers enabled the co-ordination of production of different models on one assembly line which meant huge savings in manufacturing costs. Its decision to move it operations to the Transvaal was no longer a question of escaping organised workers in the Eastern Cape because Transvaal auto workers were now equally organised, but was rather a strategic move to overcome distances from major vehicle markets and suppliers and in order to re-organise and rationalise its operations where newer plants were situated. "On paper" wrote *The Star*, "Samcor ... is doing all the right things, painful though some may be in the short term."[36]

By 1986 mergers and departures left eight auto companies operating in South Africa and a new ownership pattern had emerged. On the one hand greater monopoly control by a few large firms had developed. On the other hand, as in the case of the Samcor merger where Ford Canada held 42 per cent of shares and Anglo-American owned the rest, a larger share ownership on the part of South African companies was observed. Sanlam bought Nissan, and the Wesco group owned the majority shares in Toyota. This trend was also observable in the components and retail service sector of the industry. Wesco enlarged its component company, Metair, and together with Sanlam and Anglo American (through its subsidiary Amic) built a glass factory in Bophutatswana to

provide windscreens for their assembly plants. In addition the largest retailing operation in the auto industry, McCarthy, was owned by Anglo American.[37]

Capital's concern was to prevent further financial losses and if possible to increase its profits in a difficult environment. If this entailed `throwing its workforce on the rubbish heap` this was justified. As a Ford spokesman put it in 1984, "A private company cannot provide jobs when no useful market demand exists for their product. The only thing that counts at the end of the day is a sound and profitable company."[38] The union's concern, on the other hand, was to retain jobs wherever possible and to stave off mounting poverty and hardship in black communities. By 1983, 2 000 workers had been laid off in auto assembly - 500 at Ford, 850 at Sigma and 700 at Datsun-Nissan.[39] By 1986, over 6 000 assembly workers in Port Elizabeth had lost their jobs. Employment in assembly had peaked at 50 000 in 1982. By 1985 it had dropped to less than 39 000. In addition the Motor Industries Federation estimated that in 1985 the retail trade had shed about 15 per cent of its workforce whilst the National Association of Automobile Component manufacturers estimated that 10 000 jobs had been lost. Around the country over 35, 000 workers in assembly, components and retail industries had lost jobs.[40] Nationally Naawu's membership dropped by 2 000 in 1984 but because of rapid expansion in the Transvaal thereafter figures remained constant.

In 1985 the union still enjoyed some success in reducing the impact of job losses. As Adler commented, "Retrenchment negotiations this year prompted us to start thinking of alternative proposals."[41] The union cut the number of job losses at Sigma and converted retrenchments into temporary lay-offs at Mercedes Benz. In the latter it negotiated a scheme whereby workers were kept on the roll but could simultaneously draw UIF benefits so that when the company needed them they could return without loss of benefits. It also continued to negotiate a shorter working week to avoid lay-offs. By the end of 1984 most manufacturers were down to three-and four-day weeks. Many producers closed early in December or extended the Christmas break into January. General Motors, for example opened on 28 January 1985. These holding operations had however a demoralising effect on auto workers who lived in dread of the final layoff. Kate Sibiya, a shopsteward in a car assembly factory in 1984, talked of the difficulties of working in this fraught environment,

> I am a machinist - I join seat covers for motor cars. I've been doing this since 1979. Since the beginning of the year we haven't worked so well. There have been lay-offs. We've only worked three months full, and the rest of the year (six months) was two day, a day, five hours or so. There's always advance warning - usually about twenty-four hours. They must call all the shop stewards in the factory and tell them there'll be a possibility of a lay-off. Then they put notices on the notice boards in the factory so that everyone can read about it. I haven't counted up, but I think I haven't earned a third of what I'm supposed to earn this year. Because when you are on short time you don't get paid for the hours you haven't worked. It's really been a difficult time for all the workers in the motor industry.

> Some of the people have got jobs in other places. But it's difficult to find a job nowadays. In fact, if there were more jobs available a lot more people would have left. The disadvantage of working elsewhere is you won't get the amount of money that you are getting in the motor industry. It pays better than other industries. In decent times I earn R 112 a week. Today eighty-four people were retrenched. Both men and women. In my factory we have more women than men, so always more women are retrenched. There's a possibility that there will be another retrenchment before the end of the year. The union is quite strong in our factory - most of the workers are union members. But with the lay-offs some people want to resign, because the union didn't give them anything to live on whilst they were off work...
>
> We use the LIFO (last in first out) system for retrenchment. We tried to stop these retrenchments, but it was difficult because most of the time this year you'd get work and sit at your machine for the whole day, doing nothing. If they don't sell anything where will the money come from to pay you? It's really tough.[42]

Naawu was well aware of members' disillusionment with the union. It knew that workers in places such as Brits and Port Elizabeth faced almost certain long-term unemployment. All its efforts were of a defensive nature. Adler noted that, "... we have reached the end of our strategies."[43] For the union, the job loss issue had moved significantly beyond their early strategy of ensuring retrenchment negotiations. It realised that if it was to give content to slogans such as "Employment should be a right not a privilege"[44] it had to raise questions of how to make interventions at a much deeper level of the economy. Structural unemployment raised questions of economic planning and the possibility of the union becoming involved around broader restructuring issues with employers in order to develop sustainable employment for their members. At this stage however, the union was still exploring this new perspective, and was only beginning to raise broader issues with the industry.

NBF negotiations, 1990: non-wage achievements

It was against this background where the union believed it had reached the end of its strategies in relation to unemployment that the auto sector met to develop its 1990 sector-specific demands. These were formulated as a R2 across the board wage increase and in an act of wage solidarity both the auto and tyre sectors decided not to demand an increase on the minimum wage to enable other Numsa sectors to reach parity with minimum wages being paid in these sectors.[45] This was consonant with the union's stated aim of achieving uniform pay-scales in all its sectors. It was a notable act of solidarity on the part of auto and tyre members despite the fact that most workers were earning above minimum wage levels. The minimum wage platform had nevertheless operated as a floor from which to negotiate actual wages.

In accordance with the leadership's sentiment that, "The first danger is economism. Instead of seeing our collective bargaining as part of our struggle for an end to exploitation, we see it only as a way to get more money...", the auto/tyre sectors decided to focus on non-wage issues and won some important rights. In the area of job security and job creation they made a number of

advances. Firstly, employers agreed to consult with the union before contracting out work, and also to inform it of how many temporary workers they utilised and why. Agreement was reached on the union's demand that workers be hired on a permanent basis from the first day of employment, there was agreement with the proviso that temporary workers could still be brought in as temporary replacement labour in cases of maternity leave, long term sickness, short term projects, and shutdown maintenance. In auto, the employers agreed to set up a sub-committee to discuss the issue of temporary workers. Secondly, they agreed to establish a joint sub-committee with engineering to discuss job creation, and productivity. Finally, in both tyre and rubber it won severance of one week pay for each year of service under 10 years, and two weeks pay for each year of service after 10 years.[46] This was still short of the one month for each year of service demanded by the union but it was the first significant shift on the issue at an industry level.

It was in the area of parental rights though, that the auto/tyre sectors made significant gains largely because of the campaigns conducted by the union (in Naawu and Numsa) over the previous decade. Although Naawu had not adopted formal campaign structures, its sustained promotion of certain demands evolved into powerful campaigns. Many of these demands were not immediately won but the union doggedly returned them to the negotiating table year after year. This persistent revisiting of demands wore employers down. By 1985 many of Naawu's demands had evolved into national campaigns[47] which were also embraced by other unions, and Cosatu, as part of their living wage campaign demands. It was in this manner that Naawu emerged as a pioneering union in the formulation and winning of demands around maternity rights.

In Naawu, women comprised 10 per cent of the workforce in the components, trim, and quality control sectors of the industry but the union was equally committed to negotiating adequate maternity provisions in the male dominated auto assembly and rubber sectors.[48] Initially it focussed on securing women's jobs whilst on maternity leave. In 1983 it negotiated its first job security agreement at Autoplastics where in the past women had been obliged to resign when pregnant.[49] In 1984 it signed the first ever maternity agreement in the auto industry with Sigma in Pretoria where large numbers of women worked on the production line. The agreement gave women three months unpaid maternity leave, a commitment to re-entry into the same job at the same rate of pay, and an agreement to pay medical and pension contributions during this leave.[50]

Behind these agreements lay careful thought and hard work. Liza Makalela, a Naawu administrator, describes how women in Fosatu unions initially formulated demands,

> I am part of this Fosatu women's group. It started in 1983 after the Fosatu education workshop. They decided to have a programme on women workers. It was just a quick thing, and then it was presented for all the workers. The hall was full...what people understood was that these women were complaining about housework, and being controlled by men and so on.

> Afterwards we met and we thought about it. We decided to drop the whole double shift thing and now try to concentrate on woman at work. We started compiling a booklet.[51] After that we drafted a model maternity agreement. We even called a big general meeting, and a lot of women responded - here in Rosslyn. Together we drafted the agreement. The agreement said that jobs must be guaranteed back and we demanded pay for six months, and unpaid leave for another six months.
>
> Up until now we have not been able to get paid leave - at least not for six months. Management goes according to the ordinary law where they say maternity leave should be three months. But at least it's better than before, because they just used to dismiss pregnant workers...
>
> During maternity negotiations management said, `No, no, if women are going to be so expensive we'd better not have them here, because they're not so useful to us. We can't afford to pay them maternity.`
>
> I would like to remind management that women are going to have children who will be tomorrow's workers. Management must contribute to that, because they are paying low wages. We cannot afford to stay at home to look after the children. We must go back to work. We must be given a chance. But management says, `It's your business, if you want to have children, you can have your children, and you must stay at home. If you want to work, you must work.`[52]
>
> By 1985 Naawu's maternity/paternity campaign demands had consolidated to become a demand for protection from hazards to health during pregnancy and a transfer to a safer job if necessary, the right to time-off from work to attend ante- and post-natal clinics, protection from dismissal, and seven months paid maternity leave with the option of a further six months if mother or child were suffering from illness, the right to return to the same or similar job after leave, leave to be considered as unbroken service in relation to holidays, bonuses and benefit contributions, and time off for fathers over the period of the birth.[53]

In 1985, the union negotiated its first company agreement at Toyota in Durban in which the firm agreed to pay maternity leave at 70 per cent of the normal wage. This was the best agreement in the country. Common practice was the payment of 25 per cent of the wage by the company and 45 percent through UIF.[54] Paternity demands were negotiated for the first time in this year. Workers at Firestone Brits negotiated the first paternity agreement in the union which allowed for one days paid leave for the father on the day of the birth. Soon after workers at Dunair improved on this by negotiating one day's paid leave on the day of birth and one day's paid leave for the return home of mother and child. Paternity leave quickly became a standard demand in annual negotiations although it took time for companies to take the demand seriously. A Naawu negotiator commented, "They generally felt that the Union was pulling their leg in demanding paternity leave instead of maternity leave. It soon became clear that we wanted both. Our union demands that management realises its social responsibility in this area. Parents must be given time to give each other and newborn children proper support."[55] Agreements were slow in coming however and by 1985 Naawu had not achieved an industry-wide maternity agreement on any of the industrial councils to which it was party.

The 1990 negotiations were a turning point. On the tyre and rubber industrial council, where six large companies sat, Numsa won six months maternity leave at 70 per cent of the woman's wage - 25 per cent from the employer, and 45 per cent from UIF. In addition both sectors achieved free pap smears for all women employees. Similarly, the auto sector achieved six months maternity leave, but unlike tyre and rubber, at only 25 per cent of the wage for 18 weeks plus 45 per cent UIF payments for the balance of the six months period. In addition it won one days paid paternity leave.[56] The auto and tyre sectors were not party to an industrial council so these rights could not be extended to unorganised women in the sector but these victories obviated painstaking individual plant bargaining and Numsa had, in any case, organised most companies in these sectors.

Arising out of this focus on working women's rights was the issue of childcare. The issue of childcare had long been on the union's agenda from the days of Naawu and Mawu, but until the late 1980s it had remained secondary. At Numsa's inaugural Congress in May 1987 a "Resolution on Women Workers" included a commitment to fight "For childcare and family facilities to meet workers' needs and make it easier for workers to combine work and family responsibilities."[57] In the spirit of this resolution, a number of activist women organised a National Women's Seminar to develop demands to forward to the union's Living Wage Campaign. In 1988 a National Women Workers Committee (NWWC) was established which formulated demands around childcare in two main areas. Firstly a demand for ten days paid childcare leave per annum was proffered in order to deal with such exigencies as sick children, meetings with teachers and other child related issues. Managements frequently deducted money from wages if women were absent because of sick children. The second demand was for the provision of childcare facilities by employers because as the NWWC explained, "Working women worry a lot about the problem of childcare. There are not enough creches. Often childminders are old women who may not care properly for so many children. Added to this child care is expensive and women's wages are low."[58] The NWWC was flexible on how this demand could be formulated and there were varying opinions on the most appropriate way of approaching it. Some believed that managements should provide a childcare grant for payment towards adequate childcare. Others believed companies should provide workplace crèches. Yet others, such as Rand Scrap shopsteward Rain Chiya, offered a different view, "I don't think it's fair to have a creche at work. What about the other women in the community? It will divide us. In my factory management agreed to build a creche. So then we suggested that it should be based in the community, and that this should be for all workers, not just those workers at the plant."[59]

The union initially achieved some successes at individual companies around its childcare demands but by 1989 it had accomplished nothing at an industry-wide level. These individual achievements were however important in popularising the demands and in demonstrating to both members and employers that the provision of company childcare arrangements was possible. It was pioneering

women members such as Chiya that alerted other women workers and raised their confidence to make such demands. Here Chiya recalls the childcare victory at her company which was the first to win six months paid maternity leave in Mawu and Cosatu, "I said to management, children have the right to get sick, sick is nature. I just did it. I told them my child is sick I'm not coming and this set a precedent and other women did it also. I don't regard myself as a good negotiator, I just do it to get the support for it. Did it as an example and hope it became a practice in the factory. Now we've got a written agreement."[60] Another prominent childcare victory occurred at BMW in Pretoria. In 1989, after three years of plant negotiations, the union succeeded in negotiating a creche facility whereby the company agreed to buy land adjacent to its factory and to finance the construction of a school building and teachers' salaries. This enabled parents to pay low fees of R65 per month per child.[61]

The NWWC were concerned however to raise childcare issues at an industry level in Numsa's different sectors. In order to achieve this goal it needed to raise awareness in the union itself of the importance of these issues. In general women and other parental issues had been sidelined in the union's bargaining agenda. Women's structures were isolated from structures that formulated the union's bargaining demands, and where their demands were included they were often lost in compromises around wages and other issues which were deemed by the mainly male negotiators to be more important. In order to raise the profile of its demands the NWWC launched a campaign which Dorothy Mokgalo, a Numsa Nedcom chair, remembered was, "...to make sure that the issue of maternity leave at negotiations was always on the main bargaining agenda."[62] By 1990 the Committee had succeeded in integrating women's demands into Numsa's living wage campaign. The demands included six months paid maternity leave, 14 days paid paternity leave, 20 days paid childcare leave per annum for parents, and free pap smears for all women workers as part of a programme to enable early detection of cervical cancer.[63]

Part of the NWWC's campaign included the planning of a National Day of Action to popularise demands around parental rights in the union and "to show the bosses that most workers are parents who need time for their children!"[64] Many women activists believed however that the idea should extend wider. As Adrienne Bird, who served as Numsa's Women's Co-ordinator at the time, recalls, "We said it can't just be a Numsa campaign - that having no impact on the federation - so we must take this through to the federation and propose this. And I put forward this idea at the Cosatu Living Wage Conference in `89 and so it became part of the Cosatu Living Wage Campaign, and we jointly decided how to take it up."[65] Cosatu's Campaigns Committee decided to call on all Cosatu workers to bring their children to work on a certain day to demonstrate to employers that workers had many other roles and responsibilities outside of the workplace and women in particular were subjected to "a double shift. They work in factories all day. Then they go home to housework, childcare and looking after husbands."[66] Mokgalo recalled, "We developed

the slogan `Workers are parents too!' It was adopted as a Cosatu campaign, and we developed posters saying things like how the 40 hour week was linked to the childcare campaign, and how your maternity leave was linked, and your housing demands, and we developed a beautiful *Campaigns Bulletin.*"[67]

The day was set for 20 September 1990 and workers and the union prepared employers for the onslaught. Indian women workers at Pineware in Durban for example, informed employers of the campaign and encouraged them to provide facilities for the day. As a result Pineware management erected a large marquee for the children to play in for the day. *Numsa News* instructed members that `those workers that have childminders will bring them with them to work. Shop stewards will take it in turns to look after those children that don't have childminders. We must all discuss with employers ways of solving the problems of childcare. These problems must not just be left to mothers!"[68] On September 20, union members from factories all over the country brought their children to work and at many of the larger Numsa factories, workers held placard demonstrations with their children alongside them. At Nissan, in Rosslyn, Pretoria, more than 1 500 children reported for work with their parents. The employers panicked and quickly locked the factory gates! In response workers held a three hour demonstration with their children and went home. Many companies responded in a similar manner but the unions had nevertheless made their point.[69]

Numsa's campaign yielded results in its 1990 negotiations. Auto, tyre and rubber employers in their National Bargaining Forums agreed to one day's paid childcare leave. Although other unions won gains at individual factories many did not have the capacity to take advantage of employer's offers and it was Numsa alone who made some limited industry-wide and plant gains. The childcare concept persisted in Cosatu however and in 1993 Cosatu's *The Shopsteward* reported on a childcare day of action which led employers at the Numsa factory, Hendler & Hendler in Benoni, to agree to negotiate childcare facilities. By this time Numsa and Cosatu childcare demands spoke more broadly of the quality of family life and formed a package of integrated living wage demands as these Cosatu demands demonstrate,

> * Childcare facilities and creches at work and/or in our communities.
> * A living wage so we can feed, educate and clothe our children.
> * Houses, electricity and clean water so our children can live in comfort.
> * Joint control of security forces to bring peace to our communities.
> * A 40 hour week so we can have time with our children.
> * 20 days paid childcare leave to help our children leave to help our children when they are sick or have problems at school.[70]

In auto negotiations the following year employers on the National Bargaining Forum agreed that the problems of childcare 'will not be solved by additional leave, but by the provision of adequate childcare facilities in worker communities`.[71] This in principle recognition of childcare needs by employers opened the way for more extensive initiatives at plant level, and allowed for childcare

issues to be placed on the agenda of every workplace.

The parental rights and childcare campaigns were characterised by the vibrancy of the smaller Naawu and Mawu actions in the early 1980s. Once again a 'professional intellectual', Adrienne Bird located within the union, had assisted in the creation of vibrant women structures which, driven by women worker leadership, took on a life of their own and mobilised women in Numsa factories through effective campaigns. Such campaigns broadened the scope of possible bargaining demands and through careful organisation, accessed members' creativity which included the production of worker media, propaganda, and publicity. The scale of the union's vision allowed for a constant expansion of new demands to take up on behalf of the working class. The variety of issues the union tackled was impressive but at the same time this proliferation of demands at times meant successful campaigns, innovative ideas, and large amounts of energy were ultimately wasted or led to limited gains. Numsa did not have the resources to pursue gains made or, as in the case of the childcare demand, mainly male shopstewards did not have the commitment to driving the initiative at plant level. Agreements were made that never moved beyond NBF files. Yet the power of these unrealised gains would linger on in employers and workers' collective imaginations. Childcare campaigns humanised black people for rigid white employers and the demand for parental rights expanded the confidence and sense of entitlement of working men and women members in the union.

Revolt at Mercedes - significance for the union?

The winning of significant non-wage benefits at centralised level was however not of great importance to some of the mainly male workforce at East London's Mercedes Benz. For them, more money was the issue. In August 1990 a group of about 1 000 Mercedes workers struck and staged a factory sit-in to demand that the union exit the National Bargaining Forum (NBF). The NBF, they argued, acted as a brake on the attainment of more substantial wage increases. Strikers also demanded a R3 an hour across the board increase. Numsa was at the time negotiating a R2 increase on the NBF which it had dropped to R1,50. The union's leadership was confronted by strikers who carried placards and mock coffins denouncing officials and the NBF.[72] The integration of former Saawu (SA Allied Workers Union) members into the union in 1989 was also to emerge as central in the dispute.

Friction between Saawu and Numsa members had a long history. In 1983 Naawu held the majority in Mercedes Benz. A year later however Saawu made inroads into the plant and attacked Naawu for its affiliation to Fosatu and for its reluctance to engage with community politics. In 1985 management in a divisive move awarded limited recognition to Saawu shopstewards. Thereafter, according to the Naawu chair of the shopsteward's committee, Mtutuzeli Tom, "we were at loggerheads…There was not comradely relations".[73] Disputes centred around registration of unions

which Saawu opposed as collaboration with the state, general unionism versus industrial unionism, affiliation to Fosatu and Cosatu, and Saawu's open links with Sactu and the ANC. So intense was the competition between the organisations that different youth and community organisations in East London's townships aligned themselves with different union groupings.[74] This competition was further fuelled by the replacement in 1986 of the United Democratic Front (UDF)[75] Border Chair, Joe Mathe, by George Tshwete who was not sympathetic to labour's concerns. Attacks by unemployed youth sympathetic to Saawu were conducted on the leadership of industrial unions and houses were bombed.[76] The launch of Cosatu however boosted Naawu and it pushed hard for the inclusion of Saawu in the metal union talks. At Numsa's launching congress Saawu failed to submit membership figures and was excluded, to the disappointment of Naawu, whilst Numsa promoted an open door policy to its entry at a later stage. A strong faction within Saawu believed the union should not subsume its identity in the new metal union. During this period Numsa's power in the Mercedes plant grew and it was against this background that tensions erupted on the shopfloor at Mercedes Benz in mid 1988, for which management was chiefly responsible. The spark was a Numsa decision to refuse to handle goods, and to strike in solidarity with, dismissed Numsa workers at a Mercedes supplier. Management brought in Saawu members who opposed the action as replacement labour. Serious violence erupted between the groups on the shopfloor which ultimately resulted in the dismissal of 18 workers. All parties, management and the unions, realised the need to improve shopfloor relations and in this environment Saawu members agreed to integration into Numsa in East London in early 1989. By this time Saawu's membership numbers in the Border region had substantially dwindled. New shopstewards from both unions were elected.[77] Cosatu itself was however still struggling to consolidate its regional structures in the Border area.[78]

The strike also unfolded against a history of opposition to the formation of the NBF from chiefly, but not solely, former Saawu members. From the inception of the concept in 1989 a group of workers had voiced their opposition to centralised bargaining. Tom recalls having to conduct four general meetings to discuss and explain the issue. All of them were accompanied by walk-outs although the majority were in favour of the formation of the NBF. Subsequently 25 000 auto workers fought to establish the NBF in accordance with a 1989 Numsa national congress resolution calling for centralised bargaining in all its sectors. In late 1989 Numsa conducted its first negotiations under the auspices of the NBF which resulted in a R1 per hour across the board wage increase despite an original union demand of R2 across the board. This resulted in a R5.50 hourly rate which meant that Mercedes Benz workers, who already earned R5,62, received no increase. The minimum in other auto companies was between R 4,17 and R 4,50. This fuelled workers fear about, and opposition to, the NBF. Resentments were aggravated when the company withdrew its offer to cover observer travel expenses to negotiations. Ludwe Bakaco, the strike leader, was one of the observers who was dropped whilst non-strikers Tom and shopsteward,

Tembaletu Fikizolo, were included in the negotiating team. Following the 1989 annual negotiations a general apathy and poor attendance at union meetings ensued and simmering resentments remained. [79]According to Bakaco, who was incidentally not a former Saawu member, when national negotiations began in 1990 "workers still had a grudge from the previous year."[80]

It was against this background that the August 1990 strike unfolded. At the 1990 NBF negotiations Numsa submitted a R2 across the board demand. Management responded with a 50 cents offer. Tensions on the shopstewards committee became palpable. At a July 1990 general meeting for the bargaining team to report back on a new management offer of R1, discussion on the issue became increasingly heated. Renewed demands for Numsa to exit the NBF were made and large numbers walked out of the meeting. Union negotiator Les Kettledas, who was called in to address workers, commented that, "It was extremely difficult for the union to deal with the actual situation. The issues were not clearly identified, there was a lot of emotion."[81] A call was then went out on 16 August 1990 for a factory occupation to demand an end to the NBF and a R3 across the board increase. Strikers argued that if the company could afford to pay higher wages, union policy must accommodate this. Initially 2 000 workers responded but this fell to 900 and then settled at a core of 500 strikers. Management refused to entertain the demands citing the 1987 post strike agreement that wages would be negotiated in an industry-wide forum alone. It suspended production and annual negotiations until the union clarified its stand on the NBF. About 3 200 non-striking workers left the premises, despite heavy intimidation, and followed developments on the dispute on their radios at home.[82]

Ten of the eighteen shopstewards who supported the strike were ex-Saawu members who non-striking shopstewards alleged were quick to mobilise around dissatisfactions that members had concerning the NBF.[83] Tom who was one of 5 shopstewards who opposed the strike, put it more bluntly, "If you put money in front of workers you can lead them in any direction."[84] Nonetheless a large number of Numsa members, both former Saawu and others, supported the dissident shopstewards. Despite discussions with Numsa's president and general secretary workers continued their action. Over time factory occupiers dwindled to about 300 whilst those opposed to the strike steadily increased.[85] Ultimately, following a two week sit-in management called in the police on September 2 to evict the remaining workers who were subsequently dismissed.[86]

The plant remained closed for a further seven weeks, as striking workers, Numsa, and management struggled to clarify the conditions for re-opening the plant and wrangled over the reinstatement of the dismissed workers. The company refused to withdraw the dismissals whilst in an ironic twist officials under attack from strikers negotiated on their behalf. Kettledas commented, "We didn't accept management's right to prescribe to us. They wanted us to expel them from the union - but if people are guilty of an offence one must investigate the causes and follow the procedures.

Expulsion would be an extremely serious step."[87] Simultaneously the Auto Shop Stewards Council, and the National Organising and Campaigns Committee (Nocc), resolved that to dissolve the NBF would break workers` unity across the auto sector. This was a sentiment expressed widely by members in Numsa's auto factories as well as workers in satellite factories. Non-strikers, now locked out of the company, became progressively more angry as the dispute dragged on and no wages came in. Outside the factory many East London and Ciskei suppliers to the Mercedes Benz factory, where Numsa and other Cosatu affiliate members laboured, were forced to put employees on short time or lay them off. Many felt expulsion from the union was the most appropriate response.[88]

Meanwhile auto employers used the strike to delay national negotiations. Only after heated discussion with the union did they finally agree to continue. On 14 September an agreement was reached which gave auto workers a R1,15 across the board increase and a new minimum of R6,60 backdated to July 1. In addition employers, in a major move forward, agreed to a uniform job grading scheme across companies through compression of the previous eight to twelve grades to five. Thus the agreement succeeded in raising the wages of a number of workers in lower grades. The number of grades had been an on-going grievance which the union had attempted to address over a period of ten years. It was only through assembling employers in one forum that the union was able to engage in a comprehensive discussion on the system of grading in the industry. These substantial advances at an industry level, which included the extension of parental rights, rights for temporary workers, and progress in the area of job loss and job security, made no impact however, on the stance of the striking workers.[89] Yet this was surely a strong vindication of the union's determination to uphold its participation in a centralised bargaining forum, despite an obvious need to clarify how higher paid workers could benefit from such negotiations.

On 20 September the union called an extraordinary, and highly strategic meeting where it solicited the assistance of the ANC and SACP which had recently been unbanned. Most Mercedes workers were supporters of these organisations and attendance in a packed Mdantsane church hall exceeded 2 000 members. On the platform sat a row of senior political and union leaders and behind them two rows of shopstewards from opposing camps. They had assembled to work out a solution. General Secretary, Moses Mayekiso outlined the problem that the closure of Mercedes Benz would mean for workers and the region, a position that the popular UDF leader Steve Tshwete and SACP leader, Joe Slovo, endorsed saying, "Workers can make mistakes, but they can never be wrong. It is not a question of right and wrong, but of power, of being able to continue struggling and make advances."[90] It was in this forum that the union advanced the idea of arbitration for those dismissed. It was a vital meeting, and an important breakthrough which allowed the strikers to participate in a number of meetings over the following three weeks, without losing too much face. Dissident shopstewards agreed they had made mistakes and that the central issue was to unify

workers, and respond to management. They agreed that assaults, coffins, placards and songs insulting comrades should cease. Nine weeks after the closure of the plant, the union and company signed an agreement which allowed for arbitration over the 538 dismissed workers. In a notable contrast to the nine week strike of 1987, the strikers won nothing. Through the agreement, the company began to wrest back the control that it had lost in the 1987 strike. The agreement bound workers to an acceptance of the NBF agreement and to "all the collective agreements concluded between MBSA and Numsa and all company policies and procedures, subject to the terms of the recognition agreement" and to an acceptance of production targets. In addition, in an unusual clause, the agreement laid out steps for the union to undertake in order to establish a sound relationship between management and the union which included the employment of an experienced organiser in East London with direct responsibility for MBSA and that the union give comprehensive training to its shopstewards.[91]

What was lost or won for the union in this prolonged internal dispute? Was it a significant brake on the union's consolidation of power on a national industry level? In an immediate sense the strike was highly embarrassing for the union leadership who were in the middle of a court case which was attempting to impel Delta Motors to join the NBF whilst a Cosatu campaign to compel the Barlow group to adopt centralised bargaining was being waged. Moreover, the dispute sent shock waves throughout the labour movement and the broader South African left. The *South African Labour Bulletin*, for example, devoted thirty pages to the strike, its longest article ever on a single factory dispute. Other Cosatu unions were in the process of fighting for industry wide-bargaining in accordance with Cosatu policy and were looking to Numsa as an example of the power that centralised bargaining could accrue for them. The left was attuned to sterling tales of worker solidarity, endurance and intense union loyalty. Now worker greed was manifesting itself in the face of the very union that had enabled them to advance to where they were. Was the union movement, and Numsa in particular, people asked, breeding a labour aristocracy in a wealthy sector which represented the dangers of factory tribalism, sectionalism, and economism of which the president in his address to the NBC had warned? Was this the beginning of the end of the socialist project that the union advanced? Was the worker unity and power that Numsa had built over the years going to be squandered by divisions amongst workers over money?

In retrospect these responses could be seen as an over-reaction to an isolated problem in a single factory. The union did not lose membership, the factory remained loyal to Numsa, the dispute did not replicate itself in other auto companies, and the union continued on its course of centralised industry-wide bargaining. Yet in many ways the dispute in this factory was a signifier of deeper contradictions that were manifesting in the union. The union was abruptly confronted with the contradictions in its centralised bargaining policies. Bargaining centrally raised questions of how to ensure that workers continued to feel empowered and in control of their union. Workers, in

Mercedes, had seized unprecedented levels of control in their apartheid workplace yet they were now learning that there were limits to this control. These limits were being defined not only by management but by their own union and by the consequences for unity, and power on the shopfloor. Disunity, workers painfully learnt, only weakened their position in relation to capital and had allowed the Mercedes management again to seize the reins of power whilst the union bargained from a position of weakness. The union too was to confront the consequences of undermining workers' militancy and strength by removing control from the factory floor to an industry wide forum. It was faced with the problem of how to sustain worker unity in a changing political and economic environment where flexible approaches and responses would be required from workers. This was especially important when integrating new members who were not attuned to Numsa's strategic manner of operating and were keen to flex their power and to make rapid monetary gains. The union observed too, how rapidly unity could be undermined, and how easily in this volatile environment distrust and violence could develop.

The old Saawu/Numsa antagonisms clearly played a role but on further investigation it appears that other forces were also at play. Ludwe Bakaco, a strike leader, claimed that striking workers were averse to participating in the NBF because many members, including ex-Saawu workers who had recently entered the union, did not fully understand the NBF or other union policies and structures. Bakaco himself had only recently become a shopsteward. Opposing shopsteward Mtutuzeli Tom disputed this and argued that only a few months before members had demonstrated in support of striking Toyota workers when their management had refused to join the NBF. Notwithstanding, union leadership themselves held different versions of how bargaining should proceed. The union's 1989 congress resolution on centralised bargaining had not ruled out plant-level bargaining after a centralised bargaining forum had set minimums. Numsa's auto bargaining team had however, in order to bring employers into the NBF, agreed that there should be no further plant-level bargaining on issues agreed at industry level. Numsa's General Secretary, Moses Mayekiso, whose roots lay in the engineering industry, was not unsympathetic to the dissidents' position, "I would not say this was a revolt against union policy. Workers felt they were not getting what management can afford, and that the NBF deprived them of the chance to push for more. Dual level bargaining is the answer... It already exists in the metal and engineering industry."[92] Kettledas, however argued that there were differences between the metal engineering and auto industries,

> We used the National Auto Shopsteward Council to compare conditions in different factories, and over the years we made them more uniform. In the 1988 negotiations we managed to pull all the company agreements into line, so that they expired on the same date...The NBF negotiates actual wages and conditions, not minima. There is no basis to then go to the plant level and negotiate the same thing. Only where the parties agree to refer an issue to plant level will it be negotiated there.[93]

The union however, albeit most intensely in the engineering sector, was engaging in serious debate

on the issue of levels of bargaining and what bargaining strategy to adopt. A union document on the issue asserted the importance of all level bargaining. The union noted that employers were increasingly rejecting negotiations at industry level because "they want to predict or control events well in advance" but that industry bargaining was essential for the building of campaigns and concomitant wider working class consciousness, and for raising minimum conditions across the industry. Sustaining the union's base in democratic shopfloor structures and in the solidarity at company level through national company shopsteward councils was also critical. It was thus necessary to bargain both at enterprise and shopfloor levels to ensure that factory structures did not "degenerate... because there is little for factory-level structures to do. Activists then simply bring news to shopsteward councils. Unity in the factory becomes weaker because workers are not struggling together for immediate issues which unite them in a direct way. Even dismissals then fall into management's trap of being handled as purely individual issues according to disciplinary procedure."[94] And of course, from the Mercedes strikers point of view, what stronger issue was there than that of higher wages to unite workers on the factory floor particularly where there were strong procedures already in place to deal with disputes of right. The union was in a dilemma around how to sustain high levels of worker participation and democracy whilst trying to define what issues it bargained at the different levels and how the levels related to each other.

Taking into account leadership's differing views on the issue of plant versus centralised bargaining it is also possible that there was some confusion amongst membership. Workers observed that Mercedes' management was reaping rich profits and strongly believed that employees who had generated much of this wealth were entitled to an appropriate share in these profits. Auto union leadership had until recently endorsed this dual level bargaining approach. In 1987, it had supported a 9 week strike at Mercedes where the union demanded an increase over and above industrial council rates. This despite the fact that a tacit understanding existed that actual wages, and not minimums, were being negotiated and that rates agreed upon at industrial council level represented actual rates to be paid in the plant. The year 1990 ushered in the first full national negotiations on the NBF and it could be argued that membership was not yet familiar with this centralised approach. Mercedes workers were however thoroughly familiar with industry wide bargaining having participated throughout the 1980s in the Eastern Province auto Industrial Council. These workers were also however, familiar with the union resorting to plant bargaining when it suited it. The union had attempted to educate membership on the implications of centralised bargaining, but each session had been disrupted by a walkout.[95] It was clear that the issue of centralised bargaining was still under contestation and there was not yet uniformity of opinion as to how the union should proceed. This was 1990, the year Mandela was released, a new spirit of reconciliation was abroad, and the auto leadership were embarking on serious discussions with employers over restructuring the industry. Leadership's goal was focussed on stabilising industrial relations and this entailed a strict adherence to procedures and rules that had been agreed

between the union and management. It would appear however that this new approach to industrial relations had not yet filtered through to some members who were still imbued with an adversarial style of conducting labour relations.

Added to this was the volume of internal union changes that membership had to absorb as structures, procedures and bargaining concepts became more complicated. Negotiations were more complex and distant from the shopfloor and Mercedes workers had only two delegates on the bargaining team. Negotiations took place in a different city, report-backs could never generate a binding mandate from one company because the bargaining team had to deal with mandates from different companies across the country, and negotiations were difficult and lengthy which resulted in delays in the implementation of the agreement. As Kettledas explained, "This year [1990] again we only reached agreement two and a half months past implementation because of lengthy negotiations over job grading."[96] The auto industry was less complex than the engineering or motor industries because of the small number of large plants which enabled it to report-back via large plant general meetings. Nevertheless shopsteward delegates still had to take decisions and report-back on bargaining policy and implementation in a range of different forums such as the National Congress, National Bargaining Conferences, the National Campaigns and Organising Committee, National Industry Councils, the National Campaigns Co-ordinating Committee and in shopstewards councils and general meetings. At the time of the strike shopstewards and union members were still in the process of absorbing and adjusting to this new complexity. The dispute illustrated how difficult it was to communicate, and ensure membership internalised, all these changes despite Numsa's advanced education and policy formulating structures.

In addition the strike showed the limits to an undirected expression of workers' control. In the 1987 strike workers' control had expressed itself through a unity of purpose and planning which had harnessed a high degree of discipline and purposeful use of power. After the strike, as Tom expressed it, "Workers had unity, and confidence in their strength, their shopstewards and the union. Numsa became very powerful. Workers felt they could control the plant..."[97] This was a perception which was endorsed by management. At times workers stood at the assembly lines with mock AK47s or bazookas strapped to their backs.[98] From 1987 onwards Mercedes members continued to challenge management and to mount stoppages around a range of issues such as racism, insults, and unfair discipline until in desperation the company appointed a new management and a new recognition agreement was signed which significantly extended trade union rights. In addition the company spoke of the need to address informal structures, "We've addressed the formal structure, that's easy" said Kopke, "It's the informal structure, that's the critical one. If the culture is a racist one you can change the structure a hundred times, but you won't change attitudes. Then there's the culture on the shopfloor, which is that management is the

enemy. We have to change that culture, not just sign agreements."[99] Many workers however were still locked in resistance mode to the previous repressive management. There were limits however to this expression of workers' control. The union's socialist agenda had never embraced a call for the occupation of factories in order that they be controlled and managed by workers in the way that Russian and Italian workers occupied factories in the early 1900s and attempted to run them themselves.[100] Yet many workers at MB felt empowered to do so. Workers were not however armed, there was no revolutionary movement supporting an insurrection which provided workers with an appropriate means to do this - the bazookas were in the end only made of cardboard. The union's policies were evolving into a quite different project. It was not the overthrow of capitalism through factory seizures but rather a move to co-determine the direction of their industries in partnership with capital. The dissident strikers of 1990 were thus expressing a form of workers' control and power that the union did not endorse. The harnessing of worker power in a different, more complex manner, was the union's project and it needed a powerful, but disciplined workforce to undertake this project. There was a group of shopstewards in Mercedes however, even if in the minority, who were willing to move in this direction and in this sense the struggle at Mercedes became a symbol of the struggle over the union's future direction and the nature of power that it wished to seize.

Hyman has commented that the unofficial strike directed against some policy accepted by union leaders is an important counterbalance in the light of institutional tendencies within trade unions. He notes that "...`willingness of work groups to follow their unofficial leaders in defiance of their unions, by striking for what the unions will not demand, or against what the union will accept` has been seen by Clegg [101]as a significant restraint on the development of autocratic leadership."[102] In this sense the Mercedes strike certainly alerted the union leadership to membership grievances. Leadership recognised that this worker revolt was not just about undisciplined membership and the strike alerted them to the challenge of effectively communicating new directions the union was taking. The Nocc, for example, responded by calling for a commission of enquiry "to find out all the weaknesses and mistakes"[103] of the union. The leadership recognised that of necessity there would be tensions and differences in outlook between national leadership and membership at the base, but needed to work out how this tension was to be managed. The leadership itself was not entirely sure where it was taking the union. It was only beginning to respond to the need for change in a transitional society, changes of which the Research and Development Groups (RDGs) had given it a glimpse. It was asking membership to express a solidarity with metal workers across a whole industry, and as Tom expressed it, this was a delicate balance, "You cannot avoid the money issue, you have to *balance* politics and material interests. That is what we are doing in the NBF - on the one hand we ask workers not to abandon their brothers at Toyota. On the other we are trying to share the various gains made at the different companies."[104] But a solidarity to what end? The union recognised that these were complex issues that raised fundamental questions about

its politics, and about how much it would accommodate itself to a capitalist agenda. It embraced questions of whether membership would be willing to adapt to a changing environment in the way leadership envisaged and whether a highly pressured union would be able effectively to communicate its policies to members. The union was growing continuously. The challenge was to ensure that its campaigns and media and education programmes reached this expanding base so that it could take Numsa's policies forward into the factories.

3. End of the road: bargaining wages & retrenchment 1991-1992

Introduction

It was in 1991 that the full import of the auto National Bargaining Forum began to dawn on workers across the auto industry. Mbuyi Ngwenda, a Volkswagen shopsteward and later Numsa general secretary, recalled:

> We began to engage in national strikes in 1991. This was important because the whole union now was acting together to deal with the bosses. There was co-ordination, and setting up strike committees, and mechanisms of reporting back. Workers were beginning to realise that they belong to one family and they have common problems and Numsa was their national union... The fact that Samcor, VW, Delta shopstewards came together in a caucus meeting preparing for negotiations around similar demands, this was an eye opener because workers saw that workers deal with the same things.[105]

In the NBF a more consensual style of negotiations was evolving as the 1990 negotiations had demonstrated. The 1991 NBF negotiations revealed however the contradictions that accompanied this shift in style and content. Negotiations in 1991, like those in engineering, produced important concessions at the same time as a major confrontation was looming. Years of suspicion and adversarial bargaining were not going easily to change. A more consensual approach to bargaining which entailed an exploratory and discursive negotiating style was still being conducted in the context of Numsa's determination to win demands that had not been met in a more polarised bargaining period. The union was projecting a contradictory message, a message which was in large measure forced on it by obdurate employers. On the one hand it genuinely desired to engage employers in fruitful and creative discussion around restructuring the industry, but, on the other, it needed to deliver to its membership and employers were in no mood to concede. In effect this meant that the union was riding two horses. It was attempting to adopt a more consensual style of negotiations on some issues whilst engaging in its previous adversarial mode on others. Employers were also ambivalent. They too were locked in a history of suspicion whilst tentatively engaging in limited areas of co-operation. They were not demanding the cessation of industrial action but that the union abide by agreed procedures and agreements and that a measure of management control over the workplace be returned. The union on its part was trying to decide what it wanted to

control and what areas of control it would concede to employers.

Industry-wide strike in auto

In 1991 the Nocc decided on a different approach to bargaining across all sectors. The union was concerned that its huge range of bargaining demands led to a lack of focus and urgency and inevitably entailed the dropping of demands that were consistently ignored. The union explained its shift in approach thus,

> In the past our demands ranged from a living wage, to reduction in working time, from job security to parental rights and service-related benefits. At first we were successful but recently it has become common practice for employers to play certain demands off against others...Employers then focussed on the wage increases and discarded the other demands saying they couldn't afford them.
>
> Even on our side the long shopping list of demands was causing problems. There was such a long list that it was difficult to report back on all the issues. On top of this some of the demands were not easy to explain or understand. So most people when they reported back just focussed on wages.
>
> In negotiations things moved slowly. For months we met with employers again and again trying to get the whole list through. We felt we had to do this because it was our mandate from workers. Our members lost interest in negotiations, they lost their militancy. And in the end all we got was agreement on the core issues of wages and very little or no improvement to the other conditions of employment.[106]

Whilst this was an overstatement as the union had consistently made progress on issues other than wages, it did represent a concern to resolve the problem of extended bargaining and membership's alienation from this process. Thus the union decided to advance five core demands in all its sectors. Heading this list of demands was job security and training, whilst other demands covered wages, the reduction of job grades, the scrapping of differentials in wage rates or conditions based on geographical areas or size of workplace, and 20 days paid childcare leave for parents per annum. [107]

The decision in the Nocc to focus on job security and training resonated immediately in the auto sector as early in 1991, 1 200 workers were retrenched at Nissan in Pretoria. It was thus that a moratorium on retrenchments became one of the main foci of demands on the NBF. This immediately led to a confrontation with industry employers. This focus also brought the issue of training to centre stage. By this time Numsa's training RDG was well underway and its research had placed a new emphasis on the issue of training. The union believed that access to skills would enable individual workers to further their employment and promotion opportunities whilst it would discourage employers from retrenching because of the financial investment made in training workers. Employers were sympathetic to the training demand especially as the industry required a higher level of skill than in many other of Numsa's sectors. Discussions led to an agreement to establish an auto Industry Education and Training Board (IETB) which was jointly to be controlled by employers and the union and to be funded by employers. This agreement accorded with a new

training policy that Numsa was beginning to explore which linked `economic transformation` and the restructuring of the industry, to the importance of a more skilled workforce. Company specific training would be portable and recognised across the industry, and workers' skills would be credited wherever they sold their labour in the sector. Furthermore, employers agreed to union involvement in the establishment of an industry-based Adult Basic Education (ABE) programme, and they mandated the newly established IETB to initiate immediate work `to develop education and training to cover all workers from sweepers to engineers.`[108]

This was however the limit to co-operation. Negotiations rapidly deadlocked when employers refused to meet Numsa's demand of an across the board increase of R1 an hour, or 25 per cent, whichever was the greater (inflation was running at 14 per cent[109]), and refused to table an offer on job security. The Auto Council, consisting of shopstewards from all auto plants, decided to declare a dispute. Employers immediately prior to the strike indicated their willingness to table something in respect of a moratorium on retrenchment. A strike ballot was conducted and revealed that 56,47 per cent of workers were in favour of strike action.[110] Thus ultimately, in a similar manner to the engineering strike of 1992, the dispute unfolded as a simple wage strike despite the union's intention to focus on demands other than that of wage increases.

Workers took the decision to strike despite a severe recessionary climate in the auto industry. Employers confronted a sustained contraction in the passenger vehicle market which could be broadly attributed to an increase in car prices owing to fluctuating exchange rates and a decrease in disposable incomes. Between 1985 and 1989, for example the price of Mercedes Benz and Toyota cars had increased by 177 per cent and 172 per cent respectively while prices in general increased by less than half this amount. The passenger vehicle market had been in continuous decline over the previous decade. After reaching a peak of 300 000 units in 1981, sales had declined to 183 000 units by 1992, a drop of 40 per cent. Sales were about half what they were in the early 1980s and seven assemblers were competing for a share of a market which in some countries represented less than the sales of a single car. The planned car output in 1992 was only about 170 000 - 180 000 cars compared to Germany and Japan's six manufacturers who produced 4 million and 6 million cars respectively. Concomitantly employment had dropped from 49 000 employees in 1982 to 39 000 by the end of 1991. The strike decision contained the strong possibility of further retrenchments. Despite the risks involved 25 000 workers from seven auto companies countrywide downed tools in July 1991.[111] Only Mercedes members, because of weak organisation following the 1990 factory occupation, did not come out. Simultaneously, 3 000 Numsa tyre industry members who had voted in a 71,30 per cent ballot in favour of a strike, downed tools.[112] Their dispute, where grievances were similar to those of the auto workers, demonstrated the power of aligning different sectors' bargaining rounds. The strike was the most expensive ever in the auto industry and caused Naamsa employers (National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of

SA) to lose more than R500 million in turnover.[113]

After 13 days of action, Naamsa and the union agreed to mediation to resolve the auto dispute and following 40 hours of discussion they reached a settlement. In the tyre industry the strike continued for 4 weeks and was also resolved through mediation.[114] The strike had focussed on wages but mediation in both tyre and auto allowed for a more wide-ranging discussion of industry issues as had happened in the engineering mediation in the same year. In auto Numsa had dropped its wage demand from a R2 an hour across the board to R 1,20 and the final agreement was R1,15 for unskilled workers, and R 1,80 or 13,5 per cent (whichever was the greater) for skilled workers. It was a settlement that maintained workers' wages ahead of inflation. In a significant shift, for the first time ever in South African industry, employers agreed to a moratorium on retrenchments. The agreement stated that no further retrenchments would take place for one year in auto, and in a separate agreement, for four years in tyre and rubber. Temporary lay-offs, short time, and unpaid leave would be employed as mechanisms to avoid redundancies. In return, the union agreed to make up lost production resulting from unprocedural stoppages and that repeated failure to reach production targets because of wildcat action would result in the withdrawal of the moratorium.[115] For employers this was an important concession wrung from the union as unprocedural stoppages had afflicted the industry over the previous year and managements were focussed on re-establishing control over the factory floor. In 1990, for example, illegal strikes broke out at SKF after management dismissed a black worker for fighting with an AWB member, at Firestone where 1 600 workers struck after a security guard was dismissed, at Goodyear where 17 workers were dismissed following a work stoppage, at Mercedes where 3 000 workers struck after a fight between a worker and a foreman, at Rowen's Auto where 700 workers struck after management created a forum for discussing work grievances without consulting Numsa, whilst a further 3 500 workers at Toyota Isipingo struck in solidarity with Rowen's Auto workers.[116]

Mediation concluded on a conciliatory and positive note when both parties gave their "commitment to the long term growth and viability of the industry and the protection of jobs within it."[117] To further this aim agreement was reached to develop a programme of action through a joint industry sub-committee on job security and productivity, to negotiate the introduction of new shift patterns and forms of work organisation and a fair system to reduce absenteeism, and to develop a mechanism to improve product quality in order to deal with international competition. Employers hailed the agreement as a major breakthrough and Volkswagen's Brian Smith asserted that it signalled "a form of co-determination and co-operation between employers and workers in the industry."[118] Furthermore the union expressed a genuine commitment to the agreement, and workers at Delta, for example, immediately began to make up lost production time.

There were however hidden dangers for membership in the agreement and some unionists

expressed reservations about the lack of formal agreement on the role of the union in deciding production schedules. Management still firmly controlled production targets. Hartford however argued that the agreement had opened the way for workers to engage on the issue of production targets, and that a new era of struggle around management's right to decide on levels of productivity had commenced, "For us it is a principle to keep wages distinct from negotiations over productivity... The real point about this strike is that in this era of the 'social contract' and the 'new deal', workers can still be the ones to determine what that deal should be."[119]

Difficult bargaining environment: 1992

In 1991, 35 000 workers were retrenched in engineering,[120] whereas in auto and tyre, employers, bound by an agreement, were unable to retrench one worker. In 1992 the tyre industry agreed to extend the moratorium on retrenchments for a further year until June 1993. In auto however the 1992 NBF negotiations proved difficult for the union. The moratorium on retrenchments in the employers' assessment was proving unrealistic when considered against the state of the industry. Employers refused to proceed with negotiations unless the clause was dropped. Productivity in some plants such as Toyota had increased over the previous year and some on the Numsa negotiating team argued that the union should engage in further discussions on productivity in order to sustain the moratorium on retrenchments. Ultimately however it was felt that the moratorium was unworkable when most workers, except at Toyota, were facing shorter and shorter hours. At Samcor, for example, over 4000 workers were being paid 66 per cent of their wages as a result of working 66 per cent of normal time.[121] The 40 hour working week had been steadily eroded from 35 hours to 32 hours accompanied by a proportionate reduction in pay. In this context the union agreed to re-negotiate the moratorium which again rendered the industry intensely vulnerable to redundancies. As *Finance Week* put it, "Extending this moratorium is a battle that Numsa is most likely to lose, paving the way for up to five thousand jobs to be shed."[122]

The union however negotiated a useful fall back position even if it was not first prize. It presented the concept of a Work Security Fund. It argued that it was the employers' responsibility to address issues pertaining to retrenchment and in consequence they must be prepared to pay for it. Ultimately, employers agreed to contribute 10c per hour, per member, to a Work Security Fund with the proviso that such funds should contribute to three months re-training, on full pay, on the occasion of retrenchment.[123] The union also fought hard for redundancies to become an issue of negotiation. In the first breakthrough of its kind at an industry level agreement was reached that retrenchment was no longer an issue of consultation but an issue of worker rights that had to be negotiated. If the union did not agree with retrenchments, it could now legally strike or trigger internal arbitration. Hartford commented, "That was a major achievement. And we got all of this on the back of the moratorium. This had never been achieved anywhere else in the world in a multinational company."[124] There was agreement too that the last out in any company must be the

first back when a vacancy arose. Naamsa committed itself to keeping a register of the name and redundancy date of each retrenched worker.

In negotiations employers also made it clear that they were not prepared to grant above inflation or inflation-linked increases. Wages again dominated negotiations and despite the union's determination to adhere to a set of core demands (namely wages, job security, parental rights, workers' rights, ending of discrimination) it still emerged with a 'shopping list' of almost 20 demands which fell under each core demand. The result was the usual prolonged negotiations which terminated in the declaration of a dispute. The union again demanded a R2 per hour or 25 per cent on actual wages whichever was the greater. Inflation was predicted as rising 14 - 15 per cent over the following year. Ultimately wage increases agreed upon were below the rate of inflation. On issues of workers' rights Naamsa was also not amenable. Demands such as paid leave for shop stewards training, the right to strike and picket, the right to information, and the right to membership meeting during working hours on company premises were quickly dispensed with. Employers insisted that all such rights be negotiated at plant level in terms of extant recognition agreements.[125] They were on a course of reasserting management control and were not prepared to entrench any rights that would further boost workers' control.

4. Conclusion

The auto sector achieved some remarkable victories in the early 1990s both in the wage and non-wage spheres. Its most impressive victory was the acquisition of a moratorium on retrenchments negotiated in 1990 on the NBF. This was an advance that other sectors of the union were unable to achieve chiefly because they could not harness the power that a smaller, more homogenous and skilled sector of the workforce could assemble.

Yet its achievements were fragile, particularly in the area of job creation and job security, in the absence of a worker centred strategy for the long-term development of the industry. Every victory opened up new areas of struggle and contestation. The union was coming to realise that without a clear and proactive policy framework within which to operate, the rights of labour would be subsumed in the ideological contestation that had been released on the unbanning of political organisations in 1990. Thus, although the auto sector was in a more powerful position than the disparate engineering sector, it was to find itself in a similar cul-de sac. It was confronted with the knowledge that unless the union made serious interventions, its sectors would continue to decline, the industry would continue to lose jobs, and the union would continue to bleed membership.

Numsa had already embarked on a search for alternatives from 1989 onwards when political negotiations became inevitable, but it was only in 1993 that it pulled the threads of its thoughts

together and attempted to implement its new programme. The processes and thinking in which the union's leadership engaged in the years prior to the implementation of its new strategy will be explored in a later chapter (Chapter 8). The next chapter will chart how the engineering sector over a similar period was coming to the same conclusion as auto which was in essence that the union needed urgently to develop a proactive strategy in order to ensure that labour would move to centre stage in any future political dispensation.

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Chapter 7
Defeat of Mawu Strategy

1. Introduction

By 1990 the auto and engineering sectors had established powerful national bargaining forums. The previous chapter explored how the auto sector wielded this new found power between 1990 - 1992. This chapter explores the progress in the engineering sector between 1989–1992 after establishing itself as the major union bargaining partner on the Nicisemi following the 1988 `strategic strike`.

Previous chapters have explored South Africa's economic decline and its impact on the engineering sector which, partly because of the numbers employed in the industry, was most devastatingly affected. Employment by 1989 had still not returned to pre-recession 1981 levels despite higher outputs.[1] Many companies had restructured their operations in the interim and had raised productivity through the streamlining of production which involved the introduction of more efficient technology and the employment of fewer workers. Workers in union meetings complained that their workloads had increased and that managements in many factories were talking of higher efficiency. They noted that management would not hire more workers when the economy improved because they wished workers to do more work for the same wages.[2] It was against this background that Numsa's engineering sector achieved some of its most progressive bargaining outcomes and some of its most significant defeats.

2. Bargaining in Engineering 1989 - 1992

A New Bargaining Trend?

Introduction

In 1989 Numsa entered Nicisemi negotiations as the most powerful of the 15 unions party to the Industrial Council where it represented 115 000 workers in an industry of 360 000. It possessed more members than all the other unions combined.[3] Its new status empowered it to exert greater pressure on employers and, in addition, it entailed a new responsibility to ensure that a constructive settlement issued from Council negotiations. It was no longer possible for the Minister to gazette an agreement without Numsa as a signatory, and it was no longer possible for the union to employ the Mawu tactic of exiting negotiations without signing an agreement. It now held the responsibility of strengthening the institution and ensuring the Nicisemi's survival.

The union came to negotiations with the intention of negotiating urgent concerns other than wages. Its plan was to open a dialogue with employers around the issue of job loss and job security within a broader economic context. In the Numsa President's words, "Capital has attacked the workers to cut their costs. The first thing they are attacking is job security. We have seen more and more permanent workers replaced by temporary workers. A lot of work is sub-contracted... if we don't defeat this attack, money won't help - because you will be unemployed anyway... It will be very short-sighted if we just concentrate always on money."[4] In the past Naawu, Mawu and Numsa had attempted to address retrenchments at plant level through the negotiation of procedures. Now it aimed to address the structural problem of unemployment at an industry level and to challenge the employers' unilateral approach to restructuring their companies.

The union attempted for the first time since entering the Nicisemi to alter its adversarial style of bargaining in order to engage employers in broad discussions on the issues of securing jobs, job creation, training, and a social security net for those losing jobs. In Alistair Smith's words,

> We set job security as the major theme, stop all retrenchments! Because the flood gates were opening! We were just losing jobs all over the place. So the critical demands were severance pay and job security. So the idea was now we were trying to set a national framework, that would force companies to seriously negotiate... That year, [1989] we started introducing a motivation with a general economic context. Talked a bit about restructuring and started engaging the employers a little bit more.[5]

1989 Nicisemi Negotiations

Numsa forwarded a range of proposals around job losses to the Council which, although largely echoing demands of the past, it advanced with a new seriousness. Among these was the wish that in the event of employers introducing extra shifts, this should eventuate in the creation of new jobs rather than increased overtime. Overtime, Numsa proposed, should be limited to a maximum of five hours a week in a 40-hour working week. In response to a growing trend for employers to relocate to homelands where restrictive labour laws did not apply, it demanded the negotiation of factory closures. In the event of retrenchment it proposed one month's wages for every year of service and that redundant workers should be the first to be employed when new jobs became available. The union raised for the first time the issue of job security for temporary workers and demanded that such labour be put on permanent contracts from the second day of employment. It proposed that the six months probation period required by the LRA be scrapped in order to prevent its use as a convenient way of discarding workers who were no longer classified as temporary.[6]

Seifsa employers were still not ready to engage on the issue of job losses. The union achieved little beyond a Seifsa agreement to reduce the probation period to three months, to grant not less than 30 days notice of closure including the disclosure of all information relating to a relocation, and to the establishment of Industrial Council sub-committees on temporary labour and retrenchment to make recommendations to the Industrial Council executive committee. Employers made it clear that they

felt no onus upon them to consult on retrenchment, or to give notice of intent to sell and for the first time put forward their own demands. One of these was to exclude small business, with less than 20 employees, from the scope of the Main Agreement because, employers argued, the stringent provisions of the agreement inhibited the growth of small companies and hence the possibility of job creation. Seifsa's demand was advanced in the context of the government promoting a similar deregulatory strategy. In 1986 it had passed the Temporary Removal of Restrictions on Economic Activities Act. This allowed it to declare defined industrial areas, or zones, free from industrial legislation such as the LRA, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and health and safety laws such as the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act governing standards of employment elsewhere in South Africa for companies employing less than 20 workers. The government argued that this would allow for job creation by permitting small business the freedom to operate unfettered by restrictive legislation which overly raised their operating costs. In essence it was creating trade union free zones.[7]

The coincidence of government and employer strategies on the issue of job creation was not accidental. The government supported Seifsa's demand by informing Industrial Councils that they were permitted to set differing rates in the same job categories in order to create jobs. Wages in rural areas, for example, could be lower than the urban equivalent. In addition the National Manpower Commission recommended to Industrial Councils that they exempt small business from their agreements. The Director General of Manpower, Joel Fourie, launched an attack on Industrial Councils expressing his view that national industry bargaining was inappropriate for a developing economy like South Africa and that enterprise bargaining was more sensible because employers could pay what they could afford.[8] In the union's view this meant "that they [companies] can afford to pay *less*, not that they can afford to pay more."[9]

Numsa read these strategies as less about job creation and more about restricting union power. It rejected Seifsa's exemption demand and pointed out that up to 22,000 workers in the metal industry were employed in small business and exemptions would in effect mean that they had no minimum wage and employers would be free to pay whatever they wished.[10] Numsa indeed hoped to achieve an extension rather than a narrowing of the Industrial Council's scope to cover numerous workers in the metal sector who did not fall within its ambit. This included workers in the container and television industries, workers who were not directly involved in production such as clerks and stores, and many workers in rural and homeland areas. The union successfully blocked Seifsa's attempts at exempting small business from the agreement and Smith declared that, "...we don't think the Minister should have anything to do with extending the agreement. That is something that should be settled by the parties themselves... Numsa is not prepared to have deregulation in the industry, and won't entertain proposals that exclude workers from minimum protections."[11]

The union however was still confronted with the problem of the minister granting exemptions even where the Nicisemi had refused them. This meant that most companies in rural areas were paying on average fifty per cent of the Council's minimum wage. The Council itself was les than fully co-operative on this issue. Although Seifsa, after the 1988 strike, had recognised Numsa as the majority union, it was slow to agree to the restructuring and democratising of the Council which meant that Numsa was at a partial disadvantage. In 1989 the union was still fighting to achieve proportional representation on the Council. The system continued to award trade union parties of vastly different numerical strength the same number of votes. This became a particular problem on sub-committees where Numsa continued to be outvoted by racist white unions much smaller than itself which held such attitudes as "... you don't have to pay African workers much in the rural areas because they just stay at home longer if you pay too much."[12] A desire to engage and exert power in sub-committees of the Council represented a significant shift from Mawu's engagement on the Council. Organiser and later General Secretary of Numsa, Enoch Godongwana, recalled,

> When we went there (in 1983) we said we don't just care about any sub-committees, we'll fight these guys head on. I think it was a good strategy because we didn't have the technical capacity to spread ourselves out... We said don't lock yourself into all these bureaucratic sub-committees…Let's do battle in main negotiations… It's only towards 1989 that we started looking at these things. We looked at the pension fund. This has got billions and billions and we don't know how to invest it… We realised we also need to take into account some of these sub-committees 'cos we've got no power, they're discussing medical aid, they're discussing pension...We had allowed the voting institution to remain the same… it was the weakness of our strategy.[13]

Involvement in sub-committees however again raised questions of representation. Smith raised the issue on the Council and proposed that final decisions not be taken in sub-committees, "We have repeatedly proposed that for these sub-committees they should be based on proportional representation…We would like to again propose that these matters that have been referred to all these sub-Committees, the temporary labour, the retrenchment, etc. that decisions not be taken in such sub-Committees with which we are unhappy and that basically we should have the right to block decision making if we are not happy with them."[14] The union began to adopt a policy of bringing sub-committee topics into main negotiations because `we didn't have the power there.'[15] Employers distanced themselves from any such decision and continued to hope that the CMBU block would outnumber Numsa votes on sub-committees. As Angus put it in the Industrial Council meeting of 13 June 1989, "We, as the employers, do not wish to attempt in any way to dictate what the representivity of the various trade union parties on a sub-committee of that nature should be. One point we do want to make clear, Mr Chairman, is that the employers would have extreme difficulty in agreeing to any one trade union having the right to veto decisions made by the majority of members on the Industrial Council Committee or sub-Committee …any one trade union having the right to say `We do not go along with that` and therefore have a right of veto as far as that is

concerned."[16]

Despite the leadership's attempts to shift the sole focus of negotiations away from wages, the wage issue continued to predominate. Following its 1988 strike assessment the union decided not to enter an alliance with IMF unions on the Council believing that ".further cooperation on campaigns like this will only give these unions credibility which they don't deserve. Their membership is too small to significantly affect the outcome of the negotiations now."[17] The other IMF unions combined had a membership of approximately 25 000 and their participation in the living wage campaign in 1988 led Numsa to the conclusion that they lent little extra power to Numsa's campaign and created considerably more work and co-ordination than benefits to the union.

The union had power in the Nicisemi, but how much power and how could it be exercised? "What is the balance of power in the industry? Is it with the workers or with the capitalists."[18] asked Numsa's President at the opening of its Bargaining Conference. Closely related to this question was what could the industry afford. The union believed that the big companies who were the major employers in the industry could afford a great deal more than they paid. As the President noted, "We know that companies like Highveld Steel, Samancor, Iscor, Siemens, Altech, Anglo American, Barlow, Gencor and so on are making huge profits. These profits do not go to workers."[19] National organiser, Bernie Fanaroff, pointed out that employers, shareholders, and white South Africans were buying luxury items, while black workers lived in areas where there were few basic facilities such as water, roads, and electricity. He informed Seifsa that in the light of this non-provision the union was demanding that employers cease to deduct taxes from black employees wages because they experienced no benefits from these deductions.[20] Ultimately this was not a demand that the union pursued.

The union decided not to advance a specific minimum amount for negotiation because of the widely differing minima that existed as a result of plant bargaining wage agreements. It decided rather to demand an across the board increase of R1,50 on the minima which would bring the lowest paid in the sector to R5 an hour. The other IMF unions, ironically with considerably less power than Numsa, demanded a 2.50 across the board increase to bring the lowest paid to R6 per hour. Seifsa offered a 38 cents across the board increase which would bring the lowest paid to R3,40 per hour.[21] After a series of meetings in which Numsa threatened to declare a dispute, the union dropped its demand to 60 cents per hour or 20 per cent across the board on the minimum rate for the job whichever was the greater. This was a new tactic to enable workers who were receiving higher wages to get a larger increase and to thus feel that the Industrial Council was representing their interests as much as the low paid. Seifsa's final offer, which Numsa accepted, was 54 cents across the board which brought the minimum to R 3, 56 an hour from the 1988 rate of R3,02.[22] This was

measured against R4, 50 an hour in the auto sector.

Despite the dominance of the wage issue in negotiations the union initiated a serious shift in focus to non-wage issues particularly in the area of worker benefits. In 1983 Mawu had won an important victory when it established the principle of worker representation on pension boards arguing that the metal fund, which was worth more than R500 million and obliged all black metal workers to join,[23] should allow worker control over how these funds were invested and dispensed. Six years later the union was continuing the battle for a more appropriate vehicle for such funds by advancing the demand for Seifsa to convert the industry's Metal Industries Group Pension Fund into a provident fund. A provident fund would entitle workers to a lump sum pay out on leaving their employment no matter the reason, whereas the pension fund only permitted the withdrawal of funds at the retirement age of 65 years. In 1988 the union had put the same demand but Seifsa had not shifted from the employer stance of the early eighties which was to insist that workers were not able to manage the large amounts of money that a provident lump sum payment entailed, and would later discover they had no provision for their old age. Numsa argued that there was no state social security for the unemployed and thus retrenched workers relied on pension contributions to survive. Moreover, it observed, few metalworkers retired at 65 years. Many died before this, and most workers had exited the industry before 65, the overwhelming majority by 45 years.[24]

In the 1989 round of negotiations the union took an uncompromising position on this issue. It made it clear that the union would not attend negotiations, or would immediately declare a dispute, unless this demand was acceded to. Seifsa conceded and agreed to create the Metal Industries Provident Fund where contributions would merge with the pension contributions and workers would have the choice of either remaining with the pension fund or moving across to a provident fund. All future members would however automatically join the provident fund. Continuing to address non-wage issues, Numsa demanded that its semi- and unskilled membership be given access to the Metal Industries Medical Fund (Mimaf). Seifsa acquiesced and agreed that Numsa members could in addition choose to register and contribute for dependants.[25] Moreover, it agreed to extend the industry's sick pay allowance and to restructure the Sick Pay Fund, and in the area of maternity benefits to increase the number of maternity benefits from two to three pregnancies. Finally the union, after years of negotiating on a plant by plant basis, won the right to May Day and June 16 as paid public holidays. Seifsa agreed to exchange `Workers Day` for May Day, to grant an extra day's leave on June 16, and to endorse this in a separate agreement to prevent the minister from blocking the gazetting of the Main Agreement.[26] The union was thus making substantial progress in the area of providing adequate benefits for its members.

The 1989 engineering wage talks were a milestone in the union's history. They were conducted and

settled more harmoniously than in any previous year. No dispute was declared, no industrial action was taken, and for the first time in nearly 10 years all 15 unions accepted Seifsa's final offer and signed the agreement. The union also gained huge ideological credit as metal workers observed the manner in which Numsa had used this centralised bargaining forum to win important victories, a far cry from the hostile and toothless institution that Mawu had entered in 1983. The union's membership swelled as it became the largest Cosatu affiliate, consisting of 235 000 members, a huge increase of 70 000 new members over a period of 18 months.[27]

Did this unprecedented peaceful resolution of Nicisemi negotiations connote a new trend? Was this the beginning of a new era of new politics, new relations where capital having acknowledged the power of its major partner on the Nicisemi, was now willing to shift to a more open-minded, creative and change-oriented approach? Conversely was the union and its membership showing a willingness to shift from its previous defensive, and adversarial style of approaching employers and to engage in a more co-operative mode of bargaining where a genuine dialogue on the future of their industries could unfold? These were questions that the leadership were beginning to ask as it embarked on a process of examining its strategies in the country's rapidly changing environment.

Local Level: Industrial War and Violence

Outside the Nicisemi however, such shifts to the evolution of a more co-operative relationship, looked almost absurd. Here an industrial war was being waged. As the union rapidly grew, and organised all of the large companies, workers from numerous small companies headed by unsophisticated managements were recruited. This prompted an eruption of disputes of right. In the Wits Region particularly numerous illegal strikes over discipline and retrenchment occurred. Small employers handled disciplinary issues in a clumsy and ignorant manner and resisted the employment of modern dispute resolution methods such as mediation and arbitration. To a lesser extent even in the larger more unionised companies fierce battles were being waged. Workers distrusted the possibility of the Industrial Court dispensing a swift and just resolution to problems and met dismissals with confrontational collective action. Workers' responses also reflected the Nicisemi focus on retrenchments. Numerous employers refused to negotiate adequate severance agreements and, according to the union, some managements, such as at RBF Malleable Castings, appeared to be provoking retrenchment strikes in order to dismiss and avoid paying out severance packages. Such tactics have been documented worldwide. Crouch notes that strikes are sometimes provoked when an employer is faced by dwindling orders. *The New Statesman* commented on this trend in Britain in the mid-sixties labelling it `the boss's sympathy lay-off', "The art of the sympathy strike, the secondary boycott, has been in the country not so developed as the boss's sympathy lay-off, where a strike by 48 people in a car radiator factory automatically means that thousands of men elsewhere in the industry lose their jobs."[28] Many employers' response to illegal strikes was mass dismissal which was sometimes followed by re-employment on terms which

forbad overtime bans, or which placed restrictions on both legal and illegal strikes. Industrial action at Donn Products, Valmatex, National Bolts, and Academy Brushware concluded in this manner.[29]

A disturbing trend was for managements also to employ greater force and violence during industrial action. The South African Police were frequently called in to break up or monitor strikes, as were private security firms which, at times, videotaped strikes in order to identify `agitators` to assist companies in their mass dismissal and selective re-employment tactics. Strikers were attacked at Macsteel, Genrec, Duropressing, Thorn Lighting, Cinqplast, RBF, Olive Rubber, Barlow (Kew), and Haggie Rand.[30] Accompanying the trend to employ outside assistance in dealing with industrial action, was employers' growing use of consultants to manage their labour relations. In negotiations, the union was often confronted with outsiders rather than managers from the company who ultimately might have had a greater sympathy, or interest, in a satisfactory relationship with their workforce. A union press statement noted,

> Numsa is becoming increasingly alarmed at the growing number of self-styled industrial relations consultants plying their limited skills in the industrial relations market. These consultants are strongly anti-union. Their advice to employers is based on union bashing... The union is seriously perturbed that too many ill-qualified consultants are entering the rapidly expanding industrial relations field, selling themselves to management as 'experts' and making a real mess of employer-employee relations.[31]

But was it a simple as this? Numsa membership too was embracing violent and coercive measures as a tactic in its struggle to assert union hegemony in the workplace. Concern was expressed in the union that violence would undermine its power particularly during industrial action. Von Holdt, for example, charts the emergence of violence at Highveld Steel during the 1980s, and Webster and Simpson plotted escalating, and progressively brutal, violence in industrial action in the late 1980s. This was accompanied by a concomitant increase in criminal charges laid against individual workers.[32]

Webster et al located the increase in worker strike violence in high levels of worker frustration which could not be defused through institutionalised industrial picketing mechanisms. They contended that an effective picket was an indispensable mechanism for containing conflict in a strike and that violence escalated when this was denied. Picketing at factory gates, they argued, was widely accepted as a peaceful method of bringing moral pressure to bear on replacement labour and non-strikers. It allowed striking workers to attain a measure of control over the situation and hence avoided other more radical, or violent means of seizing control such as factory occupations, industrial sabotage, or aggressive intimidation of non-strikers. Furthermore, they argued that the question of union access to the company's premises and to their striking members was essential. In order to perform an educative, informative, mandating, and disciplining role the union needed to conduct regular report-backs on the progress of negotiations and other strike issues

in the workplace. In the absence of such progress reports a frustrated ignorance and powerlessness eventuated accompanied by a concomitant undermining of the negotiation process. In such a context containing conflict became an almost impossible exercise.

In South Africa in the late 1980s picketing remained illegal and although spontaneous pickets did occur, police attacks and arrests of strike leaders made it a risky tactic. Frequent strike lock-outs by employers, individual and mass dismissals of strikers, or a refusal to grant entry to union officials to factory premises meant that the union often did not have access to membership and could thus not play a constructive role. Dismissals in particular often prolonged strikes and together with strikers' levels of stress, fear, impoverishment, frustration and at times loss of company or municipal accommodation raised frustrations and resentments to unbearable levels and often closed off peaceful resolutions to strike action.

Liberalised picketing laws would certainly have removed the heat from these strikes, but Webster et al are probably optimistic in their assessment of the extent to which it would have reduced violence. Crouch points out that picketing laws in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s (where both primary and secondary picketing was permitted) did little to prevent the outbreak of violence at factory gates. He further notes that at the time of the general election in Britain in 1979, 90 percent of workers supported a legal ban on secondary picketing because of the violence associated with it and that this was a factor in working people voting for a conservative government.[33] It is unlikely that strike violence, in South Africa in the 1980s, could have been contained by picketing and as Hyman notes, "Not all conflicts are capable of containment and absorption by the social structures that give rise to them."[34] Violence at this time was manifesting across all levels of South African society both within and outside the workplace. Indeed Webster et al themselves note that the decline of violence in strikes in advanced capitalist countries had been accompanied by access to political rights. Without such rights, they contended, there could be no lasting solution to the problem of violence in strike situations.

Von Holdt, too, situates this growing violence in the context of the broader political environment which he believed directly impressed itself on workplace relations. Charles Makola, vice-chair of the Highveld Steel shopstewards committee and chair of the Cosatu local at the time, explained, "The aim was political it was simply to overthrow the government of the day. Everything rallied around that point, that this government has to be brought down to its knees and replaced by democratic government." Workers rejected the workplace order as one that reproduced apartheid's social relations and they attempted to forge a counter-hegemonic order in the union. In forging this new order a high degree of chaos and disorder prevailed at Highveld Steel. According to Bunny Mahlangu, chair of the shopstewards committee in 1987, "...Highveld Steel was one company that

was militant, it was so militant that office bearers or leadership couldn't even stop the militancy. It was just chaotic that militancy...".[35]

In this struggle for hegemony the concept of collective bargaining as a negotiated settlement between opposing parties fractured as shopstewards approached negotiations as an industrial war, "... our approach was one of confrontation." commented Makola.[36] Management, in response ,adopted a highly adversarial approach as Frank Boshielo, a founder of Mawu at Highveld Steel recalls, "... always those strikes were resolved by the threat of mass dismissal."[37] In many instances workers were less interested in the resolution of the grievance than in the experience of power that defying management and the white order brought with it. For many this was the only source of power that black workers had ever experienced.

Van Holdt has taken the issue of frustrated access to power further than Webster et al and unravels how it became a threat to the democratic functioning of the union. He explores how schisms between different kinds of workers (educated/ less educated, migrant/urban) and the emergence of parallel structures led to violence and an undermining of the union's main source of power, namely worker solidarity and democracy. In 1986 the Highveld Steel shopstewards committee formed a strike committee as a complementary structure to inform and mobilise workers around industrial action. This structure was taken over, as Mahlangu recalls, by "...these really militant guys, guys that would like to see action, and for any petty thing they would just stop people and say, No, today we are not going to work- there's a strike... Sometimes as chairperson, I would come to work and find there is a strike and I didn't know about it."[38] In the atmosphere of ungovernability that ensued shopstewards were unable to employ their leadership skills to resolve strikes. A tension developed between the two structures. The shopstewards committee understood the wildcat strike as a means to force management back to the negotiating table. The strike committee did not face employers across the negotiating table and its aim was to create in the workplace similar levels of ungovernability that were manifesting themselves in adjacent townships. This entailed the use of violent, intimidatory, and coercive tactics to force fellow workers into taking action. Both membership and shopstewards became more and more alienated and uneasy with what they saw as the undermining of union structures, "Democracy is not a sjambok, it is about negotiation and talking." commented Mahlangu.[39]

The growing use of violent tactics by employers in industrial disputes should thus be seen in the context of an escalating violence on all levels of the society. Smaller companies who were reluctant to build a relationship with the union, were confronted in a number of workplaces with an ungovernable and uncompromising workforce which expressed militant resistance to its exploitation as well as to its political powerlessness. Employers' response further inflamed the

situation through the use of the police, security companies, replacement labour, mass dismissals, and selective re-employment. In a broader sense employers were also beginning to respond to unions with a new found confidence. In the mid-eighties managements had experienced the disciplining power of the emerging unions and their, at times, effective use of the Labour Relations Act. In consequence they had become more cautious and sensitive to the demands of labour. By the late 1980s the balance of power was again changing despite an escalation in worker militancy. The shock of the new militant unions was beginning to abate, and this was accompanied by the passing, in August 1988, of the Labour Relations Amendment Act which severely curtailed the power of trade unions (see Chapter 12 for a full discussion on this).

At national leadership level the union noted the escalation of violence in industrial disputes and expressed concern that it would lead to growing division amongst workers or, as a Numsa shopsteward put it that it would sow, "...confusion and anger, destroying everything you managed to build in the past."[40] Worker violence, the leadership noted, supplied employers with a weapon to attack the union. In negotiations the union lost the moral high ground as managements used the issue of violence to avoid settling disputes. On one level the union understood that violence against replacement labour in strikes was almost unavoidable because the stakes were high and violence against non-strikers was a universal features of industrial action. Nonetheless it was alarmed at the frequency of the violence and believed that intimidatory actions against fellow workers, even strike-breakers, damaged its interests especially as replacement labour represented a desperate sector of the unemployed working class. It believed that members should win scab labour over to their struggle through discussion and the provision of information. Moreover it was concerned that by coercing workers to support a strike through fear, such members might turn permanently against the union and sometimes with violence. Violence begat violence, it argued, and once it became a permanent feature of union life it would increase exponentially. It became more determined to campaign for picketing rights in its struggle to remove, and re-negotiate, the existing LRA.[41]

The prevalence of violence in industrial disputes had led the union to produce strike guidelines for its 1988 industry-wide engineering strike. These guidelines included injunctions that workers must voluntarily join the strike and that no intimidation or violence should be employed, that strikers must remain on the company premises and refrain from any damage to company property, that discipline was primary, alcohol forbidden, and that instructions should come from shopstewards alone who would be responsible for raising problems with the union concerning management responses to the strike. The restraining influence of these widely circulated guidelines was not sufficient however and eight scabs were killed in the strike, while a number of strikers were dismissed for violent acts or charged with intimidation. In consequence, Numsa again tried to address the issue by tabling a resolution at the 1989 Cosatu Congress, which affiliates adopted, and

which stated that unions must "work out common positions on the problems of state violence, vigilante violence, management violence and violence between workers."[42] By stimulating a broad debate on the issue it hoped to deepen workers' understanding of the need to be disciplined and to avoid violence. In addition, the resolution focussed on the necessity for employers to reflect on their own role in promoting violence. As Cosatu General Secretary Jay Naidoo explained, "We will also make demands on management for the right to picket, to use strike funds and to hold regular report-back meetings during strikes. But for this to work we must have common agreement on the notion that the state must stay uninvolved..."[43] Numsa's focus on the issue of industrial violence however was never elevated into a sustained campaign. There was a hesitancy on the union's part forcibly to implement its policy. This was probably partly due to an uncertainty around how to discipline transgressors short of handing them over to the state besides an ambivalence around the use of violence itself. The forcible overthrow of the state was also a goal still entertained by many. As a shopsteward put it, "Unions must issue strike guidelines, but at the same time unions must understand negotiations are a limited strategy."[44]

A factor, that Webster et al did not incorporate into their analysis of strike violence, was the organisational component of unions' operations. Numsa's inability to control the violence in its ranks was in part related to its extraordinarily rapid growth during this period. The Mawu and Naawu tradition of slow, thorough organisation accompanied by the consolidation of newly organised factories, was no longer possible as pressure on organisational resources increased and the influence of the union on its membership concomitantly declined. The General Secretary's report to Numsa's 1989 Congress complained, "The major problem is the weakness of our factory structures. In each factory there are one or two active shopstewards, but in many factory [sic] there is no proper report back; no shop steward committee meetings; and no general meetings."[45] Local Shopsteward Councils were in consequence burdened with factory problems and neglected the discussion of such items as Central Committee agendas and reports, and campaigns. To address the problem the union was rapidly employing new organisers but this in some respects only exacerbated its organisational problems. New organisers were inexperienced and were sent into the field without support or training while experienced organisers and educators did not have the time or resources to establish an on the job training programme. As a result membership displayed little confidence in such organisers, who often knew less than it did about factory matters, and a breakdown occurred in the relationship with the union. Fanaroff recalls the difference in membership's relationship with their organisers from the 1970s/early 1980s to the late 1980s which altered from one of co-operation and mutual responsibility to a more conflictual one,

> In the 1970s we met every factory every week and we had general meetings with factories every month. Workers were at first quite nervous but once you persuaded them they became very loyal - much more than later. Later people would beat up or threaten organisers and complain. In those days there was no question of workers blaming you if they got dismissed or didn't win a strike. It was all very democratic and everyone knew if

> there was a bugger up, they felt part of the bugger up and they didn't blame you for it. It was a very different atmosphere.[46]

The union was caught in a contradiction. On the one hand on the national Industrial Council it was advancing a more consensual style of dealing with industrial relations in the hope of engaging employers on some of the critical issues afflicting the industry. On the other hand at plant level the union was facing a sustained onslaught by hostile employers who were confronted with an ever more politicised and militant workforce. It was necessary for membership to defend themselves against such attacks but at times undisciplined militancy created divisions in the workplace and weakened the union. In addition, its rapid growth and associated capacity problems were undermining its power to explicate its policies and to raise members' awareness of what it was attempting to achieve at a national centralised bargaining level.

3. Developing an alternative vision: 1989 - 1990

Introduction

It was in the context of this polarised labour market where violent confrontations were threatening union democracy that Numsa's leadership turned its attention to developing a vision of co-operation and the reconstruction of its sectors and of a rationally planned economy. In 1989 this involved its Education Department in a bold experiment to formulate worker-researched policies.

The union for the first time embarked on serious thinking around the question of attaining 'systemic power'. Lukes has defined such power as concerning the formation of wants which are linked to the nature of the social system that an organisation wishes to realise.[47] Later Neo-Marxist theorists have built on Luke's concept of systemic power and have distinguished this form of power from less radical forms in particular that of 'institutional power'. Institutional power is seen as the ability for organisations to define what they want and to get it on the public table of political deliberations but it does not envisage fundamental changes to the nature of the existing social system. Wright expresses the political differences that accompany these forms of power thus, "*Reformist* versus *reactionary* politics are conflicts at an institutional level of power over attempts to transform the rules within which situational conflicts occur; and *revolutionary* versus *counter-revolutionary* politics are conflicts at a systemic level of power over which game to play." Numsa had attained a level of institutional power in relation to collective bargaining arrangements where it now had the power to participate in and shape these institutions. It had not however yet attained significant levels of institutional power in relation to the shaping of industrial relations legislation or in the political process. Numsa's approach had always been one of gradual, incremental change rather than of revolutionary rupture but this approach nevertheless envisaged profound systemic transformation in the manner that Wright describes, "...it is possible that reformist struggles

cumulatively could have revolutionary consequences. This is the vision of certain strands of reformist socialism."[48] Was Numsa now poised, together with the rest of the labour movement and other political formations, to shape new political and economic relations at a systemic level? The union, in embarking on a process of intense introspection, research and policy formulation certainly envisaged itself as moving in this direction. In essence the union was attempting to formulate practical and implementable policies that would significantly advance workers control in a future South Africa. In this attempt they were Gramsci's heirs in the sense that for Gramsci, Marxism was a philosophy of praxis, a fusion of theory and practice. He did not believe it was necessary to wait for 'the fullness of time' to bring about the revolution. In 1924 he reflected on the factory councils saying, "..our projects almost always had an immediate and broad success and appeared as the interpretation of a widely felt need, never as the cold application of an intellectual scheme."[49] Like the Numsa intellectuals he did not believe that a revolutionary seizure of power could be enacted by striking a single decisive blow at the heart of the capitalist system. But was Numsa going as far as to promote systemic changes which envisaged 'a dictatorship of the proletariat'? Or were its new policies in essence aimed at increasing workers' control which were located firmly within a capitalist mode of production. It is unlikely that even the leadership of the union itself was able to clearly envisage what the systemic consequences of its new polices would be. Ideological confusion around the nature of the changes they were proposing certainly characterised these new directions.

Crouch sees unions as engaging in two broad areas of contestation, namely, those of pay (substantive issues) and those of control (procedural issues) and sees the area of control as where issues of relative power are most pertinent.[50] The latter is generally viewed as the more radical and inherently political as it is easier for capital to make economic concessions than to compromise on relations of domination and subordination which enter into systemic arenas of power. Giddens concurs, "Struggles over control are 'political' struggles ... since they necessarily involve attempts on the part of working class associations to acquire an influence over, or in the most radical context to gain full control over, the 'government' of industry."[51] Control demands can of course vary considerably in their political and economic impact from, for example, the control over the speed of a machine, to control over whether or not to do overtime and how much, to a highly significant demand to have a major say in how the company distributes its profits. Control demands can at the extreme of the spectrum entail workers' running their own factories and ultimately the economy, or control demands can be more modest in their aims and simply entail various degrees of control over the work environment. Issues of control constitute the central battle ground because they are in essence the means by which workers attain better work conditions or improved material goals. Numsa, on a national level, was now attempting to demand significant levels of control where it aimed to negotiate the restructuring of its industries and ultimately of the macro economy.

The union, by attaining a level of institutional power in its auto and engineering national bargaining forums, had now been thrust into clarifying the nature of the economic and political power it desired to realise. This would involve it in debate around the transformation of the social system that it operated within. The union was shifting from a resistance mode to the realisation that power entailed responsibility which required it to delineate more clearly what the content of its socialist demands were. Its leadership began to envisage a process of engaging employers on issues of restructuring their industries in order both to increase production through the mechanisms of augmenting worker control and to create sustainable jobs. It was however ill- prepared to assume this new mantle as its bargaining strategy was mired in a cycle of unmet living wage demands. The President articulated it thus in his speech to Numsa's 1989 Bargaining Conference,

> Now that the future society is coming closer, we must ask ourselves: "What kind of society do we want?" At the first and second national congresses of Numsa, we committed ourselves to struggle for socialism. Our resolutions say that capitalism cannot solve the problems of our country and cannot provide for a good life for all our people. Our resolutions also committed Numsa to assist in the development of a working class programme to build socialism...
>
> One of the basic differences between socialism and capitalism is that socialism is based on planning - the planned use of the wealth and resources of the country for the needs and for the good of all our people...The working class must be fully involved in all the decisions of how to build socialism and they must see that socialism brings results...Our collective bargaining demands must look to the future as well as the present. We must lay the foundations now for a restructured economy.[52]

The 1989 Nicisemi negotiations had revealed that the union did not have a plan, policies, or a strategy on how to use its power to shift the society towards a socialist economy. If workers were to increase their control over productive activities in their industries it needed to engage in some urgent and detailed planning while the society was in a state of transition and multiple opportunities were revealing themselves. It needed to develop a full understanding of the sectors it organised and of the macro-economic environment they operated within if it was to persuade employers of the logic of its demands. The union's demands needed to counter an accelerating trend for employers to embark on a unilateral process of restructuring in their companies which often involved technological innovation and concomitant job loss. The union on its part had reached the limit to its job- saving tactics. It now urgently needed to move away from a focus on defending individual jobs to the development of a broad strategy which grappled with the issue of sustainable job creation. As Oscar Mgwanza, a former Feltex Automobile Products shopsteward and then regional organiser for the auto sector, explained,

> Most unions tended to negotiate wages and reduction of working hours, without challenging the reduction of working hours itself, without challenging the manoeuvres of employers to reduce costs and maintain profits in the present economic crisis.
>
> Numsa was faced with many complex issues in the industries where it organised. Employers had embarked on unilateral restructuring of industries which resulted in many retrenchments, lay-offs, redundancies and factory closures. These attacks on our living

standards required Numsa to look at ways of dealing with these complex new issues. [53]

Moreover, the union was becoming aware that a limit existed to employers conceding to higher and higher wage demands. It needed to find approaches to bettering workers' conditions, which although still involving employers in extra costs, did not raise the company's salary bill. National organisers and advanced shopstewards in National Company Councils had already started the process of exploring demands which embraced social wage issues such as pension, provident funds, housing and health. National organiser, Bobbie Marie, recalls, "What we began to open at Metal Box and Van Leer was the change from pension fund to provident fund... And then Geoff [Schreiner] started getting into benefits, and pensions, and housing and health... We expanded into negotiating medical benefits with Iscor. Then we started to expand into research. What we were doing now is trying to find the other issues besides wages all through National Shopsteward Councils."[54]

The union however had insufficient research capacity of its own. Furthermore in its explorations elsewhere to access relevant research, it rapidly came to the conclusion that little research was available, or was underway, which could assist in their task of developing a blueprint for restructuring the South African economy. It was in this vacuum that one of Numsa's most creative education/research ideas emerged, the Research and Development Groups (RDGs).

Research and Development Groups (RDGs)

The union's approach to developing industrial policies involved tapping into workers' detailed knowledge of operations, problems, and possible resolutions to such problems. This research was overseen and conducted by a combination of 'professional intellectuals' employed by the union and 'union movement intellectuals'[55] who were either in union employment or constituted advanced membership in Numsa factories. This approach drew on Mawu's legacy which held that workers were not uneducated, empty vessels, but people who possessed a rich knowledge of production processes and problems in their factories. Mawu had drawn on this reservoir of knowledge but it was in Numsa that this resource was applied to formal policy making. After discussion and analysis of this bedrock of worker knowledge, the research team used the information as a departure point for conducting further research. This research often involved the introduction of specialised knowledge in the form of presentations from experts, or appropriate site visits (including overseas sites), where the research team would engage specialists in detailed discussion. Further reflection and discussion would result in the production of a detailed set of policies.[56]

An opportunity to engage around the issue of worker training was to provide the trigger for the establishment of what became known as Research & Development Groups (RDGs). Numsa was faced with building and extending the power of labour in an economic environment that was hostile

to the extension of worker interests. It was also witnessing the relentless loss of its unskilled and semi-skilled membership. In this context the union began to view the acquisition of skills as a weapon to both drive their membership to the centre of industrial production and to imbue them with the power to control production issues on the factory floor. "There cannot be true workers' control in society" stated *Numsa News* in 1990, "until workers have the skills and knowledge to control production at their own workplaces. If new jobs are going to be created in South Africa, we must make sure that unemployed and retrenched comrades are given the training that will be needed to work in the new jobs."[57]

Industrial training however was a field of which Numsa had scant knowledge. Its only experience of training was an exclusionary one - both racial and gender discrimination on industry training boards had long prevented its membership from developing its skills. Furthermore the issue of education and training was a politically charged terrain. As former Numsa Witwatersrand Regional Educator, Adrienne Bird, explains,

> In 1976 was the student uprising and the whole debate around apartheid education and particularly around the hostility to task-performance for black people... black people are just trained for production ... Even 10 years later that debate was still brand new... training was an issue that people said, this is a kind of hand-out, and workers are getting training because they don't get an education, and training's bad and education is good. And we don't want training, we want education. That was the kind of environment we were in.[58]

Steven Rathebe, a head shopsteward who was dismissed in a strike in the 1980s and who could find no other job because he lacked skills, told this story of union attitudes to Africans receiving training, "I was offered training by my boss in the late eighties. But in those days training was seen as selling out because bosses just trained a few workers to stop them from being militant. How could I represent workers in 1988 if I had been promoted? So I said no to training as well." [59]

Employers continually complained about the lack of skilled workers but they did little to help the situation. By 1982 the system of reserving specific jobs for whites no longer operated, except in the mining industry, but in reality job reservation continued and in the metal industry racist white unions ensured its continuance. In 1982, for example, out of 5 517 apprentices in training in the engineering sector, only 390 were Africans. In the same year 59 per cent of coloureds, and 84 per cent of Africans in industry, had not advanced beyond primary school. Amongst whites on the other hand 30 per cent had attained a matriculation high school exit certificate whilst only 3.3 per cent of Africans had attained this level of education. A tiny 0.2 per cent of Africans had higher degrees, while 16.7 per cent of whites had tertiary degrees or diplomas. In the South African workforce, 30 per cent of African workers had no education at all.[60] Vocational training was controlled by the government's centralised Manpower Training Committee which Numsa had dismissed as a racist structure with which it would not engage. In 1990 however the government, under pressure from

capital, became increasingly concerned about the shortage of skills in the workforce, and in consequence established Industry Training Boards (ITBs). Through ITBs it aimed to place the control of training in the hands of employer and employee organisations in each industry, including one in the metal industry. Some of the functions of the ITBs were to take responsibility for apprenticeship training, introduce a system of modularised training, take responsibility for the development of syllabi, evaluate such training, and oversee the financing of training. Each ITB consisted of a representative from employer and employee organisations and an official from the Department of Manpower. This meant that for the first time Numsa could influence training policy. The ITBs fell under a National Training Board (NTB) which advised government on training policy. Restructuring of this kind clearly opened up opportunities for the union but it was confronted with how it would relate to these structures and what it would propose especially as it had never seriously undertaken research or discussion on the issue of vocational training. [61]

The shortage of skills in the metal industry meant that skilled white workers held employers to ransom. They could command the wages they wanted. In the 1980s employers were concerned to break the power of these white workers by training black workers to overcome the skills shortage. They did not however want to pay black workers at the same rates. It was in this context that employers started to introduce new job grading systems - in the main the Patterson and Peronomes systems. Up to this point jobs in the metal industry were graded on Industrial Council schedules, and the system was based on the skills required for the job. With the introduction of new grading systems employers now aimed to de-skill jobs so that black workers could perform different aspects of the skilled job at much lower rates. The new grading systems allowed them to do this as they were not skills-based but were designed rather to reward levels of responsibility and decision-making within the workplace, responsibilities which were denied black workers.[62]

In the late eighties and early nineties a shift was perceptible in black workers' attitudes towards training. This was in part due to a growing trend by employers to import skilled workers from overseas at high rates of pay instead of upgrading people's skills locally. This strategy led to tensions between local and foreign workers. In 1990, for example, SABS and Numsa members at Dorbyl and Mossgas went on strike in protest at foreign workers who were being paid higher wages for doing the same job. Strikers at Dorbyl insisted that the company should rather upgrade workers' skills and pay an approved rate for the job.[63] In addition, there was a growing realisation within the union that its semi- and unskilled membership base was becoming increasingly disposable and no longer represented the workforce required by capitalists. Combined with the union's new macro-economic approach, this led to a drive towards the acquisition of skills and basic education. The union believed that if it was to survive and continue to build power in the industry it needed to target the recruiting of skilled workers and to upgrade the skills of its existing membership. The

new interest in training also arose from an inability to wrest higher wages from employers. An enhancement of skills was seen as a means of ensuring improved pay for workers. Moreover, higher skills gave retrenched workers greater power to sell their labour in a shrinking market. Once the union started to explore these ideas a new interest in worker training developed and a shift of emphasis occurred. As a shopsteward at Samcor, Sam Morotoba, commented,

> We have tended to see shopfloor skills as being an employer's area. We have seen skills development as a way for employers to exploit people in the name of the economy, which we couldn't see workers benefiting from. Unionised workers have also been afraid training would take members out of the bargaining unit and to management level. We had this idea highly skilled workers earn high wages and are therefore difficult to organise. None of these things is necessarily true. Education and training can be a positive development for the working class.[64]

It was a more specific trigger however that provoked Bird into seriously exploring the issue of training,

> My shift into training happened when a guy called Allan Grimble, back in 1988, phoned me. He turned out to be the manager of the Metal Engineering Industry Training Board [MEITB], and I knew nothing about training boards and more credit to him. He came to one of these meetings called Education Committee meetings, and explained to us what a training board was. And we started saying, `Hold on, there's something important here... If you look at what white workers got with the apprenticeship system, the wages, and good agreements. Skills and wages, skills and conditions - they're not unconnected. So let's start looking at this skills issue.[65]

At the same time Bird recalls Education Secretary, Erwin urging the union to react less defensively and to develop a range of pro-active policies, "He started saying, `Look the climate's changing, we don't know about it, but mark my words they're already starting to talk about a negotiated settlement. And we'd better start thinking about constructive proposals. Instead of an adversarial agenda we'd better start being pro-active here."[66] Having made a decision to investigate training policies, Bird did not know where to begin, "And Alec said, `Why don't you set up a really big project and get your teeth into things... take three months out, and take workers and go and think about it...` It was such a big thought then because we were struggling to get workers off for three days to go on a basic shopsteward course, and he said go for three months, and do it properly, and that's a huge idea. Anyway it grew and that's what we did."[67] Bird arranged for the MEITB to speak to the union's Witwatersrand Education Committee (Wedcom). Then with Erwin's comments in mind, the first RDG was created to lend a framework to this investigation. As Bird expressed it, the RDGs gave `a shot in the arm to education in the union.` A large part of this, she believed, was listening carefully to workers' experiences, "Make sure that the worker side of it, that work experience, is what you're reflecting on. Don't sit and assume you know - get workers to tell you what they really are. And then reflect on that, and grow from that. You know there was this commitment to getting that voice heard."[68]

The successful functioning of this group led to the creation of small union-based research groups which were first agreed to in Numsa's National Education Committee, and incorporated into the union's education programme in 1989. These groups, including the training RDG, were formerly ratified in October 1988 by Numsa's Central Committee. The areas to be researched emerged from the organisation sector of the union as the union consciously sought to integrate research, education and organisation. The research groups were small and consisted of between ten and fifteen people from within Numsa who would research specific topics and work with the assistance of external researchers to guide them and provide input on areas under investigation. The groups brought together academic researchers, service organisations and worker leaders in what Mgwanza described as 'a powerful combination.'[69] In addition RDGs would locate other models of development and innovation in their research areas in different countries of the world and the union would facilitate study tours to pursue such research. The task of each group was to identify problems and draw up a framework of proposals for how the union could deal with such problematic issues. These recommendations were forwarded to the union's constitutional structures for further discussion and endorsement. Once endorsed, it was the task of the various union structures to implement the policies through collective bargaining, and campaigns. The training section of the Education Department worked closely with the RDGs and was responsible for informing and training different layers of leadership on the issues.[70] The union aimed to develop a layer of worker researchers who would acquire a detailed knowledge of their industries and who would develop sufficient research skills to continue investigations into changing conditions. This would enable them to keep other union members in their sectors informed and to keep abreast of developments in order to discuss, strategise, and present an appropriate union response at the negotiating table. *Numsa Bulletin* explained, "The RDGs were set up in a way that combines the experience in Numsa with the skills and research methods of researchers. In this way we get much better answers, we develop the skills of many of our members, and we contribute to democratising the pursuit of knowledge."[71] The Education Department co-ordinated the various RDG activities under the guidance of national organiser, Geoff Schreiner.

Over time the union established RDGs on a number of different subjects. These included housing, land and shelter where the union investigated company housing schemes, and the issue of how to finance worker housing through, amongst other things, the use of pension and provident funds. The Health RDG explored the relative benefits of medical aid and medical benefit schemes and how to raise worker awareness around the HIV/Aids pandemic. In the issue of industrial restructuring, separate RDGs were established to investigate the restructuring of the auto, electrical and metal industries which worked closely with the Collective Bargaining RDG in order to develop restructuring proposals to present to employers. The Collective Bargaining RDG was in addition exploring a recognition agreement policy, appropriate levels of collective bargaining, and how most

effectively to deal with the bargaining issues of white collar workers. A separate RDG was created to deal with issues of worker training and grading which also linked into the Collective Bargaining RDG. A political economy RDG, or Polecon, researched proposals on privatisation and deregulation and took responsibility for the collation all RDG research and policy proposals to be present for further discussion at National Policy Workshops.

The RDGs had a dynamic effect on those who participated in them as they unearthed important new data and insights, and through discussion evolved new perspectives on their industries which enabled them to advance informed proposals to the union's policy making structures. In Numsa's 1989 Congress, and in Central Committee meetings during 1990 and 1991, delegates adopted resolutions based on a wide range of proposals that emanated from the RDGs. Over time Numsa's proactive approach to investigating problems within its industries was registered within the structures of Cosatu. The Federation began to see the possibility of establishing similar structures to formulate broad national policy to which all its affiliates could contribute. It introduced Participatory Research Groups (PRPs) based on Numsa's model, and Numsa's Polecon linked up with Cosatu's research in the areas of politics and economics. Moreover the union saw the possibility of strengthening a number of its RDGs through the participation of other affiliates as it came to understand the need for Cosatu to promote industry-wide policies in certain areas. Thus Numsa's Housing and Health RDGs were absorbed into Cosatu's Goods and Services Commission. The Federation established other research groups, or commissions, in the areas of Workers Rights, the formulation of a new Labour Relations Act and the drawing up of a Workers Charter, a Living Wage Commission which included the Barlow Rand campaign to compel the company to adopt centralised bargaining, and Human Resources and Industrial Restructuring Commissions. There was a flourishing of ideas as representatives from Cosatu affiliates attended commissions, and reported findings and proposals to Cosatu's National Campaigns Committee. [72]

The new strategic orientation was ambitious, especially because it offered the union the opportunity of seizing the initiative with the industry, the state and even political formations. The major criticism of the new direction was that it was over-ambitious, and ultimately moved ahead of members and even worker leadership, in a situation where time and capacity were always in short supply, and the union was called upon to respond to an economic crisis and political upheaval. In theory Numsa had developed a new base of organisational power; the power of intellectual engagement to evolve new ways of approaching problems. It had already evolved structures to promote new policies to its membership through its campaign structures. Now it had the internal means organically to generate ideas to take the union forward. This was Naawu and Mawu's legacy translated into a different organisational form in order to accommodate an infinitely larger union confronted by progressively more complex issues. The legacy was one of intellectual engagement

with existing problems and issues, the ability to analyse, assess, synthesise and move in seemingly contradictory directions. It was the ability to think creatively and independently around apparently insuperable obstacles and the ability to persuade membership through argument, and not coercion, of the strategic logic of a position. These think-tanks gave Numsa the organisational impetus to move forward and adopt new policies and to take advantage of its recently acquired power in its industries whilst entering a decade which presented new possibilities. Why then did these research groups decline and disappear in Numsa? They were a source of regenerative power for the union as they opened up the possibility of new ways of promoting worker rights whilst rejuvenating a dying economy. In practice insufficient time and capacity often meant that these turned out to be partly or substantially unattainable ideas. Bird described the positive effect of the RDGs on participants, "We worked incredibly hard and I think that for those individuals who were involved in the process it was enormously valuable. You could see people move from shy quiet new students who would stand up and give lectures on various things."[73] However to a number of people this is where the usefulness of the research and proposals that emanated from these investigations, ended. Strong, and divergent opinions on the value of such an approach for the union and its members began to emerge. The main criticisms of the RDGs focussed on the union's inability to communicate the complex ideas generated in these groups to general membership and hence its failure to translate these policies into viable implementation on the ground. Smith saw the problem thus,

> The RDGs, the sort of research development groups, had a life of their own really. And they started developing their own agendas. We were never able to make them come alive! They were not articulated with sort of real collective bargaining processes, that was I think the critical problem with that - were really sort of aloof. And that is why they got schnied [abandoned] in the end. Because the worker leaders couldn't relate to all this academic research that was going on. And so they stopped research and development, which was a fucking big mistake. [74]

Kgalima put it more bluntly, "I couldn't understand what the hell they were talking about. I doubt that a lot of other people understood these things. The issues were complex. We came from the tradition of simple demands."[75] Nevertheless the research groups were developing "a life of their own" and exerting considerable influence in the union despite the fact that, although tasked with developing union's policies, they were not elected constitutional structures. This resulted in tensions between RDGs and elected structures, and in addition created confusion in collective bargaining because negotiators, according to Highveld Steel's shopsteward chairperson Moshe Nlapho, "...never having been involved in researching these things, would not understand the intricacies."[76] Some of the elected leadership came to resent the research groups and complained about the study trips, time off work, and the resources being spent on the groups.

Such criticisms and complaints did not necessarily stem from an anti-intellectualism in the union, or from an unwillingness to consider new directions, as in many cases the value of research and information in formulating union policy, and the value of the union's own research capacity, was

acknowledged. Kgalima believed that the results of such research needed time to filter down into the ranks of union membership and this required the RDG participants, in addition, to take on the role of educators. The process, he believed, moved too rapidly for the union to digest its implications,

> They didn't consciously use these people as trainers and educators. Do the research and allow a year, where those people in the RDG appear to the union, and educate people around this country. So we can discuss the possible implications of the strategy, `These are the issues. These are the possible problems.` Before it was just after research that it went to the central committee. Alec pushed it hard, the union was adopting, and that was it.[77]

Schreiner believed "the basic idea was good"[78] but complicated and ultimately to some extent compromised the concept by the fact that the issues were highly complex, new, and under-researched in the country generally which meant that it was difficult to educate membership on the issues when leadership were still grappling to fully understand the implications of the research. Thus when attempts were made to communicate ideas to the base they often did not succeed. As Schreiner explains,

> The problem was that everyone was grappling to come to terms with what these issues meant, and none of us had the expertise, so we were exploring issues at different levels and that was hard. So if there had been someone with expertise in housing, for example, we could have designed a method to feed into the factory floor and strengthen positions. There was a lot of bringing in of outside experts with theoretical knowledge, and linking them with stewards who had practical knowledge, and people talking past each other. [79]

There were others who believed that the focus on such research was misplaced in the union at the time. Gavin Hartford, an Eastern Cape regional educator, felt the Education Department had lost its bearings and instead of re-aligning its focus with a clear understanding of its members' needs, it moved outwards and lost touch with its membership,

> They never married education with workers` control. Education was about pushing a line... it's not about listening, learning, and researching your own members. Even when we set up the RDGs, and we involved workers in that, look at what they researched. They researched other countries! They seldom did an audit on ourselves, on our processes, and the needs of our members. When I argued this stuff I was regarded as an outright lefty. The main thing we should be researching is how to serve our members better. Yes, we must know the global situation, but that's not the main function of education. The main function is learning about your members` needs and how to tap into them so this automatically brings in issues of collective bargaining and organisation.[80]

Numsa's Education Secretary, Alec Erwin, saw the issue of workers' control and meeting workers' needs differently and in consequence believed the RDGs were largely successful in moving the union's agenda forward,

> I think the RDGs were a very successful approach. There were problems because as leadership we often ran ahead of rank and file. But I think that's a tension that you must live with. You can't remain where rank and file see things because at rank and file you've got an immense experiential richness, and you can take that and through dialogue and a process you can convert it into theory. But you can't just stay at that level, and say that's where we'll be.[81]

As an approach to evolving theory and new policy the RDGs may have been successful but a wide-spread critical consensus emerged on the union's inability to mobilise its membership and in many cases, its worker leadership, on the implementation of proposals emanating from the research. The union's campaign structures had been created more effectively to disseminate union policy to membership but as Kgalima had articulated, "The issues were complex. We came from the tradition of simple demands"[82] and campaigns were typically geared to encapsulating a message through accessible catch phrases and slogans with which members could easily identify. To be successful in communicating more complex policies to membership, in Schreiner's' words, the union needed "... people who know the area, team leaders or research leaders, who have developed a bottom up methodology and who interact well with people and build teams with admin infrastructure."[83] In his opinion however this was not a possibility at this point in time because of lack of union capacity, "...the union's problem was that it was coming to the limit of what it could absorb. It was mainly tied up with bread and butter and political issues, and so it was difficult to get discussion on pension and provident funds and medical aids to be central to the union's activities. So these issues were marginalised."[84] The union was caught in a contradictory position. It needed time and resources to inform, educate, consult, and assess workers' priorities but neither were available. The economy continued on its downward spiral, capital's response to falling profit margins was rapid and brutal and involved large scale lay-offs, and the society in general was in a state of monumental political upheaval. All these factors demanded an immediate response, and the unions who had been central players in much of this change, were being pulled in a myriad of different directions without the internal capacity to respond adequately to any of them. The price Numsa paid was to lose the potentially rich and generative power of an internal research capacity driven by a worker leadership which by its very position had the ability effectively to communicate with membership. In addition it would pay the price of not developing an effective mechanism to communicate the ideas that were generated in these forums but which nevertheless took on "a life of their own" and were adopted in the union as official policy.

The RDGs had emerged in Numsa in 1988 and by 1992 were defunct. No decision was taken in union structures to discontinue them, they were simply permitted to disappear. Some had been set up to research particular topics and once policy had been made they were disbanded. Others, such as the Health and Housing RDGs were dissolved by the Central Committee[85] in March 1991 in favour of placing Numsa delegates into similar Cosatu structures. Political developments at the time also began to absorb the union's attention[86]. Bird and Erwin the main architects of the RDG concept were often out of the union participating in tri-partite forums and were ultimately in the process of exiting the union. Furthermore, as Grice Numsa's National Education Administrator and later Publications Officer puts it, "I think the RDG issues just got buried because there just wasn't

enough time to discuss in detail all those things."[87] The ideas generated by these groups however were to linger on in the union's memory and would inform its future policy making. Recommendations would be reintegrated in a different manner into the union's later strategies. The following sections and chapters will illustrate this.

4. Shifting the bargaining agenda: 1990 - 1992

Introduction

Numsa entered the 1990s confronted by a liberalisation of South African markets. In its industries this impulse manifested itself in a number of its larger companies adjusting to global competition through the introduction of new technology, reorganisation of production, outsourcing and retrenchments. The union believed that the new strategies being implemented by managements were largely at the expense of workers and it began to participate in a number of think-tanks in an effort to develop an appropriate strategy to counter this attack on workers' living standards. A Numsa policy workshop in 1990, for example, reflected the thinking that was emerging from the union. Members and officials discussed "new challenges, opportunities and responsibilities in a society moving towards democracy" and came to the conclusion that unions should "initiate and lead the formulation of economic policy, rather than simply respond to the initiatives of the state and management."[88] This entailed the development of policy on the restructuring of the economy at macro, industrial, and workplace levels in order to create jobs, ensure a living wage and job security, meet the basic needs of all in the society, and orient the economy to interface more effectively with global economic conditions and world markets. These goals should be effected through "increasing the organised strength and consciousness, and the skills and control, of the working class, or it would never lead in the direction of socialism."[89] In essence the leadership of the union was looking at alternatives within a framework that endorsed competition on a global market and moved away from the isolationist, inward industrialisation that had characterised the South African economy for the previous decade.

The following section explores how Numsa attempted to implement this new thinking through its centralised collective bargaining forums between 1990 - 1992. In the course of this exploration it is evident that the leadership at the bargaining table were achieving some important gains in non-wage areas of collective bargaining. It also becomes evident however that this not where membership's aspirations were focussed. For Numsa members increased wages that were the prime goal and the gap between leadership's changing emphasis and the more traditional demands of membership resulted in a rising tension within the union's bargaining strategy that culminated in the 1992 strike in the engineering sector.

Nicisemi negotiations: 1990-1991

The 1990 Nicisemi negotiations were conducted in the context of a shift unfolding in the union's collective bargaining policy. In his opening address to the union's February 1990 National Bargaining Conference, national organiser Bernie Fanaroff, delineated the two basic steps towards the achievement of socialism as being the building of organised working class power, and the winning of demands to restructure the economy. "By bargaining at industry level" he explained "we can start to restructure the economy. That is why Numsa demands for a new industry training scheme, and for more job security and job creation programmes are so important."[90] One way of addressing the unemployment crisis, Fanaroff asserted, was to negotiate job creation programmes at industry level. Capital, he insisted, bore a large responsibility for the unemployment crisis because of its reluctance to invest profits in new manufacturing projects. The opportunity to invest in innovative projects and to increase employment were numerous especially in respect to the manufacture of everyday, useful goods for ordinary people. Fanaroff argued that job security meant fighting management attacks on workers' rights and living standards. This required extending the scope of the engineering agreement to cover all workers in the sector, and staving off employer attempts to deregulate industry. In a besieged economy such as South Africa's, he continued, employers should relocate profits into areas of job creation and training programmes.[91] He warned members against economism, "Instead of seeing collective bargaining as part of our struggle for an end to exploitation, we see it only as a way to get more money." He reminded them that in some cases members were paid R6 per hour minimum, while in the motor industry workers earned as little as R80 a week and in homeland and rural areas workers were often paid R30 a week. National Industry Bargaining he pointed out was a precondition to addressing these variations.[92]

In response, the NBC formulated generic living wage demands that primarily focussed on job creation and job security. This included the standard demands around severance pay, Lifo, probation, a 40 hour week and a 5 hour limit on overtime, and the new demand of an end to racial discrimination in training. In addition, it formulated demands around the democratisation of industrial councils and called for representation in proportion to the size of a union's membership. It further demanded that all unscheduled workers in the metal/engineering sector should be covered by the Main Agreement.[93] Unscheduled workers were those whose jobs were not defined and not specified in the Main Agreement and hence were not represented for collective bargaining purposes.[94] Numsa had a number of members whose jobs were unscheduled.

Following the formulation of industry-wide metal demands, the engineering sector met to add, formulate and refine its demands for the industry's 387 404 workers.[95] This provided an opportunity for union leadership to explore more broadly the future direction of the industry. Smith remembers, "... I spent a hell of a lot of time with the negotiating team, and we started debating the future of the

industry, and we came up with a negotiating team which was really attuned now for changes to happen in the industry. And were more ready to engage in serious negotiation."[96] The union also explored a set of wide ranging ideas and demands in negotiations with Seifsa employers. A Numsa poster depicting engineering workers in their habitual yellow overalls publicising the new "restructuring demands" to membership, reflected this shift in Numsa's bargaining perspective.[97]

The union entered negotiations with Seifsa and rapidly deadlocked. Bargaining was tense and the union sustained pressure on Seifsa by interrupting an employer caucus and conducting a large demonstration in and around the Germiston New Civic Centre where Nicisemi negotiations were underway. Employers were not amused as Angus' response conveys,

> Interruptions of this nature, Mr Chairman; demonstrations of this nature the Employers wish to say that they find totally and utterly unacceptable, and they wish me on their behalf to express their very serious disapproval of the incident which took place during tea this morning. They believe it's unacceptable and they believe it's unhelpful to the process; extremely unhelpful to the process. Mr Chairman they would appeal to the Trade Unions concerned – the trade union officials concerned to please do everything within their powers to prevent a recurrence of this kind of incident during these negotiations, either today or at any other time… quite apart from anything else this kind of demonstration could well jeopardise the availability of this venue for future meetings…Civic authorities take an extremely dim view of this kind of thing, and if they have got bands of people marching into their facilities and marching around with placards I can tell you now they are going to find it unacceptable and they are going to kick us out… Mr Chairman, I must just say that on behalf of the Employers, of it happens again we will have serious difficulty in continuing these negotiations.[98]

Under intense pressure from membership, Numsa declared a dispute on 26 June on the issues of hours of work, 21 March, maternity/child care, severance pay and wages where it was demanding a R2 an hour across the board increase. Seifsa was offering a 19 per cent increase on the minimum which the union rejected because it did not cater for workers earning above the minima. The union thus undertook a strike ballot in the first ten days of August.[99] The ballot reflected a 53 per cent poll, and resulted in 63 000 out of 120 000 workers voting in favour of industrial action, with 6 000 members opposed.[100] The union leadership was concerned about the low poll and about the difficulties of maintaining unity where nearly half the workers in the industry had not committed themselves to action. Potential disunity amongst workers, it believed, would be greatly aggravated by the outbreak of pernicious violence in a number of Transvaal municipal and company hostels to which the war ravaging Natal had spread. The violence was already rendering strike ballots difficult to conduct and in certain areas balloting was impossible. The union feared that employers and the state would foment the violence to crush the strike. Reports came in of employers rapidly preparing strike-breaking tactics and this further raised Numsa's fears of a bloodbath. In an employer ballot the majority of Seifsa members voted for a lock-out, and the association held a workshop on strike-breaking methods. Numsa decided to settle, and to direct its energies into countering the violence that was creating damaging cleavages between workers.[101]

A large number of members who were willing to take action were profoundly dissatisfied with the wage settlement. The union's demand had been for a R2 an hour increase which it refused to adjust over the four months of negotiations. The union succeeded in raising Seifsa's opening offer from 10 per cent to 19 per cent establishing a new minimum of R4,18 per hour. Thus the final settlement translated into a 67c an hour minimum increase. The 15 per cent (or R1,29 per hour) increase for artisans represented a minimum of R8,50 an hour. For some members this represented an above inflation increase, workers being confronted with a 16.1 per cent rise in inflation and a prime rate interest of 21 percent (which had risen by 9 per cent since 1990).[102] Many however were left feeling angered and cheated.

In non-wage areas however the union made some significant gains and laid the first foundations for serious discussions around restructuring the industry. In the arena of working women's rights, it won six months maternity leave whereby 55 per cent of the worker's wage was remunerated from the sick pay fund, whilst the UIF provided the remaining 45 per cent. It also won the right to free pap smears for all women in the industry (although it failed to achieve its demand for 14 days paternity leave). It made important breakthroughs in the areas of job security and job creation when agreement was reached to give unions notice of retrenchment, plant closures, or transfers in order to allow time for the negotiation of severance pay and related matters. Furthermore for the first time in the history of its collective bargaining relationship with Seifsa, employers conceded to an alteration in working hours and agreed to reduce the working week from 45 to 44 hours. They did not concede, however, to the hiring of additional labour in place of overtime worked but agreed to establish a sub-committee of the Nicisemi to explore ways of increasing employment in the industry.[103]

On the issue of exempting small rural employers from the agreement, Seifsa also retreated. Employers wanting exemptions were now obliged first to consult with the union. Seifsa also agreed to extend the scope of the Agreement to cover engineering workers in the homelands. On the matter of temporary workers, Seifsa agreed to supply monthly figures on numbers of workers on short term contracts in the industry, and for conditions of employment in the Main Agreement henceforth to cover such workers. The maximum short term contract was reduced to four months before a worker would be officially classified as a permanent employee.[104]

The union also initiated discussions on the issue of training and there was agreement that Seifsa should withdraw support from racist training institutions, and that negotiations on guidelines to terminate racism in the selection of employees for training be explored. Finally, in the area of democratisation of the Council, employers agreed to restructure to allow for proportional

representation.[105] The union had won some substantial concessions but it was beset with complaints from membership concerning the process, including the length of negotiations, a lack of mandating, and erratic and inadequate report-backs. The union was caught in a contradictory position whereby leadership was struggling to report back effectively because of time constraints and the complexity of issues, and where the technicalities of negotiations inevitably entailed lengthy and detailed bargaining. In an attempt to deal with such complaints and more easily to convey the complexity of issues to workers, the union decided to divide the bargaining process into three parts in order to simplify the process. Firstly, the union would continue to negotiate cash increases on an annual basis. Secondly, they would discuss long-term structural issues, such as job creation and training over a longer period of time and would shift their mandating style to one of obtaining a broad policy directive rather than a mandate on every detail. Finally, it would propose to Cosatu that demands common to all affiliates, such as hours of work, should be built as national campaigns which Cosatu would co-ordinate.[106]

The 1991 Nicisemi negotiations institutionalised these decisions within the Council. Wage negotiations proceeded as usual, but these were accompanied by the creation of a set of Industrial Council sub-committees to allow for a detailed and focussed consideration of areas that required continuous refinement, discussion and negotiation. For the first time the union proposed a detailed focus on training and gave a formal presentation on its ideas to employers. Its motivation included the proposal that in any industry training system there needed to be "…formal education components because people can't get any benefit from training without the formal education." as "We all know the legacy of Bantu education."[107] The CMBU countered the proposal concerning formal education and smugly commented that," Training and re-training we are with one hundred percent. In fact we are the protagonists of training, and have been since time immemorial, Mr Chairman. The unions I represent have been engaged and busy and represented on training bodies ever since their inception and have given much of their resources to training and re-training."[108] It conveniently forgot that its training initiatives had always excluded Africans and many other people of colour and in its responses it was still attempting to do so. "We do not see education as an industry matter at all… education really is a matter for the State…we [should] make sure that when Employees come to us they have had the benefit of the basic education provided by the State…" The CMBU was under no illusion about what the state provided and that it was only white workers who benefited from this basic education. It also attempted to restrict the number of apprentices entering the industry through the demand that apprentices be paid higher wages. In so doing it knew that it would be placing limitations on the numbers of apprentices that employers would take in and that it would be white apprentices who benefited.[109] It also complained that too much time was being spent on the `non-core` issue of training. Brian Angus reminded the CMBU that the decision was that training was `a core` negotiating issue.[110]

Despite such protests from the CMBU, the employers were willing to engage on the issue of training more broadly. Separate training, job security and industry policy sub-committees were established and were conducted more like seminars than two adversaries pitting their respective wills across the negotiating table. Smith recalls,

> We started getting presentations from Iscor, on the steel industry and what's happening with the steel market, locally and internationally. We got in Alusaf, Eskom, and the Electronics Industry Federation. So we started having an appreciation of industry dynamics, of sectoral dynamics.
>
> By exploring things, you weren't giving away anything, you could say what the fuck you wanted to really if you had a politics session or an information exchange meeting. We needed to make our negotiations much more open, just chill out a little bit. We went into a fair amount of detail around what we wanted for our training, around severance pay, and around industrial restructuring.[111]

The union's optimistic approach and the employers' participation in the process, masked, however, a deep resistance from the latter. They conducted presentations on their companies or industries but they failed to reveal much to the union. Smith recalls that they were not even prepared to divulge information of a fairly basic nature such as supplying Numsa with a list of employers that belonged to different employer federations, and which companies belonged to Seifsa. Years of mistrust had deeply entrenched attitudes and negotiating styles and employers were not going to reveal their intended strategy for the industry, although the union suspected it did not have one to divulge. Smith remembers, "They weren't sure what Numsa was up to, and they were sort of indulging us, but it was pretty much business as usual. We tried to convince them that we were on the verge of a major break. We wanted to enter into new relations. That was the kind of talk." [112]

Union negotiators may have been committed to making "negotiations much more open" around issues of industrial restructuring but membership were pushing hard for a major confrontation over wages. The union demanded R2 per hour across the board or 25 per cent whichever was the greater to ensure that all workers (including artisans) in the industry got an increase at the rate of inflation or above it. Inflation at the time was running at 15 per cent. The cash demand would continue to narrow the gap between low grade and higher grade workers in the industry whilst the percentage demand would assist workers in higher grades to combat inflation. In this manner the more wealthy companies through the meeting of a percentage demand would be forced to pay more.[113]

After four months of negotiating, and a demonstration by Numsa members during a Seifsa caucus to protest the slow progress in negotiations,[114] the union declared a dispute over the employers' offer of 9 percent minimum (86 cents per hour) for lower grade workers and 12,6 per cent (48c an hour) for artisans. It immediately conducted a strike ballot which involved it in an immense logistical operation. There were 10 000 companies in an industry employing about 387 000

workers, and it had to

canvas its membership within a two week period. Ninety percent of those balloted voted for strike action, but the union was unable to reach all members timeously.[115] It did not however attempt to extend the time agreed upon which it would need to do if all workers were to be balloted. Employers could declare the strike illegal if it was revealed that not all workers had participated in the ballot. Leadership however were deeply fearful of mass retrenchments in an economic climate where employers were eager to create circumstances which would allow them to dismiss and reduce their workforce. Here a gap between the union's membership and bargaining leadership was in evidence. Fanaroff commented on the enormous pressure from membership to take action.[116] In the event, senior negotiators decided on a pioneering approach to a resolution of an Industrial Council dispute in an attempt to unlock habitual patterns of interaction and in the hope of achieving a more favourable settlement through the creation of a less adversarial negotiating climate. This novel approach involved the use of the Council's dispute procedures which allowed for mediation. Leaderships' avoidance of strike action was however to rebound on them in the 1992 round of negotiations which will be discussed later. Smith describes how this innovative approach was received by workers and employers,

> And I had a hell of a battle convincing the Council. We had regional secretaries, and regional organisers, sitting on this Council. We would have a caucus the day before, a huge negotiation, and people would come with all kinds of reports, like "Workers are angry. Workers want to strike this year. And we don't want to compromise." Just psyching up. And we would get stuck into this mode every year, because we'd do a very general kind of price motivation on opening, but then you'd have no space to bargain, because your constituency was just so rigid. And the other side was also. It was completely adversarial stuff. So mediation was a way of unlocking this.
>
> The employers were just so completely, utterly ignorant. They didn't even understand the difference between mediation and arbitration. And this frustrated my negotiation team... And basically I got the Industrial Council chair, David Levy, he pushed for mediation. It wasn't coming from me, and it wasn't coming from the other side, and eventually we got an agreement for mediation.[117]

An unusual process developed in which, unprecedented in South African labour relations, a ten day mediation unfolded. Employers and the union agreed on John Brand as mediator. Brand was respected on both sides. Cosatu unions frequently used his services and he was on retainer to South African Breweries and other blue chip companies.[118] In essence the mediation involved a discussion between Numsa, Seifsa and Brand, whereby agreement would be reached and the mediator would approach the white union bloc with a fait accompli. Ultimately a compromise on wages was reached at the expense of the white artisanal unions where the union made the point that it was no longer going to accept below inflation for low paid workers. It involved an agreement to shift the higher percentage increase to the bottom two rates (15 per cent) and award the lower percentage increase on artisanal rates (12 per cent).[119] The minimum wage had now reached R5 minimum per hour whilst artisans had achieved 10,44 an hour. The CMBU (which also represented Yster en Staal

and Die Mynwerkers Unie) had objected since the 1990 negotiations to the lower increase for their artisan members. As Nicholson, who spoke for the CMB bloc, protested,

> … this offer… being structured as it is , says the Employer no longer appreciates the value of skilled Employees in this industry, particularly the qualified Employees, because he's still offering the skilled Employees, the qualified Employees, less than the (un)qualified [sic] in this industry. Mr Chairman that will not be acceptable. Unless the Employers appreciate the worth of the skilled people in the industry, they are are not going to get their continued support; they are not going to encourage people to become skilled people; and the industry will go backwards…[120]

Their objections however were ignored. Numsa had raised wages in the lower grades by undercutting the white unions. Smith commented: "And we really screwed the white unions...from that day on there was no way that Seifsa was ever going to agree to anything unless Numsa agreed. And so, the white power block just disappeared. And it was a very dramatic process."[121] On the face of it, Numsa's mediation strategy appeared retrogressive. It was wresting increases at the expense of other workers and not from management profits. The union however, felt little solidarity with white artisans and racist unions who had for years benefited at the expense of the low paid on the basis of the colour of their skin. The CMBU on their part were no longer prepared to struggle as they had in the past to exclude black competition. The Nicisemi minutes from the early 1990s onwards reflect the downgrading of the CMBU's status. The CMBU continued to grumble from the sidelines but with less and less effect. They persisted in disregarding Numsa's bargaining demands through such statements as "We're not discussing the real issues"[122] or "We believe we have wasted a lot of time as it is on extraneous matters… we really need now to come to finality…"[123] which were common in the Nicisemi minutes when a Numsa demand was being discussed. It was also apparent that the employers were increasingly disregarding their demands. Nicholson lamented, for example, the `very poor response from the Employer` for an increase in the shift allowance and the employers' failure to view the demand for an increase in the tool allowance as a `core issue`.[124]

In certain areas Smith's calculation that mediation would allow for 'space to bargain' was correct. The mediation exercise allowed the union to explore the problem of job loss with employers which resulted in Seifsa agreeing to make every effort to avoid retrenchment and to negotiate in good faith on the issue. In addition it agreed that instead of retrenchment, workers should be re-trained in new technological areas. A commitment was also given to divulge more useful information on management industrial restructuring intentions. This agreement resulted in a dense document which was to lay the basis for a radical new approach to Numsa's bargaining. Smith described it as being motivated by "organic processes"[125] which allowed union leadership to start seeing the links between job security, severance pay, job creation, training, and reducing wage differentials. These interlocking areas of bargaining would be further explored and developed into an innovative

bargaining policy for the union. The union was not however ready to embrace such a strategy yet. It would still have to take the Mawu strategy to its logical conclusion before it could sufficiently shift its perspective to travel along a substantially different route.

Defeat of Mawu strategy, 1992

Introduction

The 1992 Nicisemi negotiations were a watershed for Numsa. It was a year when it appeared that Numsa was at the acme of its power within the Industrial Council. The power of the white unions had withered away, Numsa membership was mobilised countrywide in an unprecedented manner, and the Seifsa employers had no option but to listen. It was in this context that the union waged its first genuine national strike across the metal engineering industry. This was an extraordinary feat as most labour historians worldwide would concur, and in South Africa a rare event. As Bobbie Marie said of Cosatu's largest union, "NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) has had only one national strike in its entire history, 1987, which it lost."[126] National strikes across an industry where institutional bargaining arrangements exist are rare. Fantasia has noted that in the North American context institutionalisation of bargaining has resulted in the diminution of militant collective action as institutional practices have limited workers' ability to pursue collective interests effectively. He argues that, "As long as workers kept within the bounds of the routinised industrial relations system.. they were necessarily shackled in their battle against the employer."[127] He further asserts that it was only when "workers sought a measure of independence from traditional, routinised practices of collective bargaining" that they were able to "mobilize effectively".[128] In Numsa's case the union was by 1992 fully enmeshed in institutionalised national, centralised bargaining at the Nicisemi. It was a bargaining institution that the leadership took seriously and where it hoped to engage employers around significant changes across the industry. Yet the union remained sufficiently independent of the institution to wage a major national legal strike. According to Fantasia engagement on the Nicisemi should have significantly contained the union's independence and its ability to take militant collective industrial action. Why did this independence from routinised practices exist in Numsa's case? The answer to this question lies in the different attitudes held by leadership and members. By 1992 the leadership was significantly committed and locked into bargaining at the Nicisemi, but general membership still viewed the institution with considerable scepticism especially in respect of its ability to deliver increased wages. Large measures of frustration against both employers and union leadership negotiating on the Industrial Council had built up over the previous four years. The all-level bargaining policy that Mawu and the early Numsa had propounded was still very much a living tradition for members and the option of reverting to plant bargaining was always a possibility. Membership at local level had retained "a measure of independence from routinised practices of collective bargaining" on the Nicisemi. It had

no fear of destabilising the delicate fabric of established relationships on the Council and it was on this basis that the union was able to mobilise widescale militant collective action against employers party to the Nicisemi. Fantasia believes that "Cultures of solidarity are formed out of friction and opposition itself. That is, solidarity is to a considerable degree formed and intensified in interaction with the opposition."[129] Numsa's leadership may have been developing a more co-operative and consensual relationship with employers on the Nicisemi but membership did not view employers as co-operative partners. Profound distrust still existed between capital and labour, and thus the 1992 collective action and solidarity was born out of significant "friction and opposition".

Union leadership had for some years been expressing doubts about the advisability of the tactic of waging an industry-wide strike but, as it grew more cautious, so its membership's militancy, sense of entitlement, and desperation in a recessionary environment, grew. Excluding 1989, every year since the 1988 Witwatersrand strike, Nicisemi negotiations had deadlocked and the union had balloted membership on industrial action. Each time, union leadership had raised objections to waging a national strike, which although genuine in themselves, reflected a deeper concern. Conducting an industry-wide strike in a recessionary environment was a huge risk and a declining economy, coupled with high levels of political contestation and violence, was an incendiary combination. Moreover certain engineering negotiators, such as Fanaroff and Smith, were beginning to doubt the efficacy of the adversarial wage-based disputes that had characterised the union for so many years (these reservations will be explored later). It was a union however, that in the last analysis was sensitive to the mood of its members, and its membership, in any case, left union leadership with little room to manoeuvre. Membership had not kept abreast of the change in character and subject matter of negotiations and felt distanced from centralised bargaining issues. In Lester's words collective bargaining had become "increasingly factual, statistical, and full of economic reasoning, so the amateur negotiator feels himself at a disadvantage."[130] Workers were not familiar with the progress of 'specialised' demands which were being discussed in Industrial Council sub-committees. The introduction of new bargaining methods, such as mediation at a national level, over which members had no control and which involved specialised professionals, further intensified their alienation from the bargaining process. Beyond that membership were fuelled by the political optimism and the heady power of the early 1990s. They were on one course and that was for a confrontation with capital. At the time Fanaroff sombrely reflected using the distancing "they" and not "we" pronoun when referring to union membership, that, "They want to strike because they feel that Seifsa has been ripping them off for some years now - and the union structures have held them back from taking action."[131] Membership's militant stance obviated the opportunity for any movement in negotiations before the strike, a mood which Seifsa swiftly sensed. The mood prior to the 1988 strategic strike had been different. Employers had believed there was a possibility of averting a strike. In 1992 however, there was a declaration of war on both

sides and attitudes hardened accordingly.

The strike demands focussed mainly on wages, and the necessity to close the apartheid wage gap by raising the wages of the low paid to reflect a more appropriate proportion of the rate paid to skilled artisans. The demand was for a R5,50 per hour minimum in the industry. The union was however not insensitive to the demands of higher paid white collar workers and hence it made the demand of R2 across the board or a 25 per cent increase whichever was the greater. Framing the demand in this manner, it explained to membership, accommodated the fact that more members were moving into skilled jobs at higher rates of pay and an across the board increase often did not award this category of worker any increase at all. "They too" the union argued "need to get a real wage increase to help keep up with the rising cost of living and to improve their standard of living."[132] A percentage based increase solved an additional dilemma. The union faced the problem of the larger companies paying above the Nicisemi minimum so that an across the board increase on top of these higher rates represented a very small improvement. Companies could "buy off" workers by offering a larger across the board increase than awarded at Industrial Council level. The alternative of a percentage based increase solved this problem and ensured that higher paid workers were also awarded a share of the company profits. This policy seemingly contradicted its policy of closing the gap between low and high paid workers but the union argued that there were other ways of narrowing the gap. One of these was to negotiate a reduction in the number of grades so that pay differences between grades would be less. The other way was to demand training for African workers so with increased skills they could move upwards and earn better rates.[133] In negotiations the union justified its pay demand by arguing that current, and predicted, rates of inflation showed a steady rise and food prices were expected to increase by 40 per cent by year end in a context of almost 50 per cent black unemployment. Employers quickly rejected the demand and offered an 8 percent or 38 cents across the board increase.[134]

Other demands that were not acceded to by employers were a moratorium on retrenchments which the auto sector had won in 1991 and which the union was attempting to extend across all its sectors, the extension of workers' rights such as 10 hours per month paid time for membership meetings on company premises, and the right to strike and the right to picket. As the union put it "workers have the freedom to strike, but do not have the right to strike. Many workers have been dismissed as a result of participation in a strike."[135] The union believed that if employers had the ability to lock workers out, the strike must in turn be seen as a legitimate weapon in collective bargaining. It also demanded the right to picket in a strike as it believed it was workers' right to withdraw their labour if conditions did not suit them and hence they had the right to peacefully lobby against replacement labour. Beyond that Numsa, in the area of workers' rights, demanded the right to relevant information from the company. Workers were affected by a range of company decisions, it argued,

around such issues as new investments, mergers and take-overs, changes in products and production methods, and in areas of health and safety around products they handled. Most managements behaved as if this was privileged, prescribed information which had little to do with labour despite workers' centrality to the production process. The union argued that negotiations were often hampered by lack of access to such information and frequently prevented it from protecting membership or creatively negotiating compromises.[136]

Ultimately, though, strike demands focussed chiefly on the wage issue and reflected little of Numsa's emerging restructuring agenda which membership had not yet internalised. Numsa organiser, Chris Lloyd, observed, "...there were these posters and pamphlets about a new form of bargaining. The reality was a traditional strike basically around higher rates of pay on actual wages in engineering."[137]

The 1992 national strike

Both sides mobilised for action. Employers revisited the ideas they had generated in their strike-breaking workshop of 1990. They explored such tactics as organising to outsource areas of work for the duration of the strike, the use of sub-contracted labour to disguise the overt use of replacement labour, the compilation of industry lists of appropriate reserve labour, strategic use of the SAPS and security companies, and research into a variety of legal interventions to prevent strike action.[138]

On a factory level membership prepared for a tough strike. Prior to the advent of the action they collected strike funds and established strike committees on a number of levels. Evans Mpanza, a shopsteward from Solid Manufacturing, and Leeto Mashiloane, a shopsteward at Abracon Industries on the Witwatersrand, respectively recall the preparations,

> As a local we launched a campaign called `Sukuma Msbenzi` (Workers Stand Up!). Sukuma Msebenzi became our living wage campaign in 1992 where the West Rand local was able to mobilise most companies to go on strike. Committees were formed by electing one shopsteward per factory. Area rallies were called to mobilise, and also to give update reports. These areas were formed by grouping companies who are closer to each other.
>
> We formed the local strike committee, and every company had a strike committee. On top of these we had a task force for every industrial area, and in the afternoon were meeting in our local to discuss problems we encountered during the day and try to solve them. We had no problem in our strike until we were ordered to go back to work by our national leadership.[139]

In August 1992 Numsa's first national industry-wide strike, which involved about 100 000 workers in 782 factories, commenced and continued for a remarkable three weeks. High levels of solidarity were maintained during this period through a range of organised union activities. Industrial area rallies and marches were regularly conducted and permanent placard demonstrations of 20-30 people were mounted, whilst mass pickets were conducted on specific days in different centres country-wide. Marches, demonstrations, and flash pickets accompanied by songs, placards, and leaflets around the factory and the industrial area were employed by the union as a means of dealing with the lack of strike picketing rights. Such activities were an attempt both to reduce violence borne of the frustration of not being able to stop replacement labour, and a way of persuading the general public of the merits of Numsa's case. Strike committees at regional and local levels met daily and kept the National Strike Committee informed of local developments. Meanwhile the union kept the press regularly informed of strike demands and developments as a means of both informing its membership and of creating an environment sympathetic to its cause. Where it felt the media was neglectful, biased, or inaccurate it lodged complaints to the editor or media associations, such as in the case of *The Sowetan* and the South African Broadcasting Corporation, and thus ensured a satisfactory volume of reportage was sustained. A Numsa strike update of the 19 August, for example, demonstrated the level of activity that the union sustained. It details simultaneous marches to promote strike demands and grievances in Cape Town where 4 - 5000 strikers participated, a march of 15 000 workers in the Nuffield Industrial area to Boart Manufacturing, a march of 12 000 strikers to Vereeniging's Department of "Personpower" and Receiver of Revenue, a march in Benoni to the South African Police of 5 000 workers, marches in Johannesburg and Durban city centres, and finally a march in the Brits city centre in which about 6000 workers participated.[140]

High levels of unity prevailed amongst engineering workers from many different political persuasions,

but there was one breach in this solidarity. This concerned the Inkatha general union, Uwusa (United Workers Union of South Africa) which perpetrated bloody attacks and killings during the course of the strike.

Uwusa had been launched on May Day, 1986 at Kings Park Stadium in Durban as a direct challenge to the gathering power of the new labour federation, Cosatu, in Natal. On the same day Cosatu had called on workers to celebrate May Day in the face of a government and employer refusal to declare it a paid public holiday. At the time it emerged as the biggest general strike in South African history when 1,5 million workers downed tools. Inkatha, in an opposing action, had bused in thousands of supporters, workers and non-workers, in all over 60 000 people, to its launching rally. Cosatu's launch six months earlier had been attended by only 10 000 workers. Down the road at Curries Fountain in Durban, Cosatu's May Day rally in 1986, in contrast, attracted 15 000 workers. Uwusa was explicit as to its target. It was not employers. Employers were sitting on the stage. Its target was spelt out in a piece of guerrilla theatre when Inkatha members circled the Kings Park Stadium in a mock funeral procession bearing coffins labelled `Barayi` (Cosatu's president) and `Cosatu`. [141] Ultimately Uwusa did not emerge as a threat to Cosatu unions in the factories. It was in essence an extension of Inkatha's political aspirations. As Alec Irwin commented, "Uwusa was never a threat to Cosatu ... it was political opposition, and it never managed to get a foothold amongst workers in Natal. Despite all funding, and documented police support, Uwusa couldn't deliver to workers."[142] Similarly, Uwusa was never able to gain a foothold in the powerful metal factories of the East Rand which it began to infiltrate in 1987 with the aim of weakening Cosatu unions. Uwusa targeted companies where they had a few members and Numsa was the majority. It then embarked on destroying Numsa's base with a view to taking over its membership. (see Chapter 12) This strategy between 1987 - 1994 resulted in brutal killings in a number of Numsa East Rand factories. Alfred Woodington, a Numsa organiser, who later headed the union's social work department, corroborates Erwin's view in the context of the spread of Inkatha/Uwusa violence to the Transvaal,

> The violence was mainly between Numsa and Uwusa members because Numsa was the biggest union in the metal industry... The metal industry had quite a number of Zulu speaking people and Numsa had quite a number of Zulu speaking members. So it was easy for Uwusa to mobilise in the metal factories. They worked up the emotions of people using ethnicity, tribalism and disinformation.
>
> Cosatu had started in Natal, and the workers that built up Cosatu many of them were from Natal, Mawu and Numsa, and they knew what they had built, and it was not easy to get those workers to change their minds and suddenly become members of a sweetheart union. So because Uwusa failed, it became a desperate situation and that was when fighting started. The only way then for Uwusa was to force and threaten members, threaten to sort out the family at home if you don't join Uwusa. Uwusa threats led to the response that you can't threaten me like that because I'm prepared to fight for my interest here and this led to conflict.[143]

It was against this background that Numsa called its 1992 industry-wide strike. Uwusa members were determinedly against strike action and both their taunting and attacks on strikers, and their willingness to operate as replacement labour, resulted in bitter fights and killings in and around factories and hostels. Employers, in the main, maintained a stony silence in the face of such attacks and generally ignored union pleas to intervene and assist in the prevention of Uwusa assaults. The union was left with a strong impression that Seifsa employers tacitly supported threats and attacks on Numsa members because their hostility to the strike blinded them to the abuse of human rights that was unfolding in their back yards. Employers were swift, however, to formally complain to the union of any Numsa membership involved in intimidatory action towards replacement labour or non-strikers. A Numsa 14 August report on the progress of the strike documented some of the violence that was being directed at strikers - information that fell on deaf ears,

> Seifsa has also failed to reply to a request from Numsa that it condemn violence and intimidation of Numsa members. This includes the murder of 10 Numsa members at Alusaf, the murder of 4 Numsa members at Wispeco, 4 at Denver Metals, and several other murders, as well as meetings held in Wattville, Jeppe, and Kwesine Hostels at which workers were told not to ballot or strike on pain of death, and intimidation by bands of vigilantes allegedly from nearby hostels at many factories in Johannesburg, and the East Rand, including Scaw Metals, Industrial Lead, Lindsay Saker and other plants. It is alarming that Seifsa does not see fit to respond.
>
> A gang of about 50 armed Inkatha supporters from Kwesine Hostel is visiting factories including Scaw Metals, Gem Industries, Chubb Lock, and Genrec Wadeville and telling workers not to come back to their jobs because they will be killed. Groups from Jeppe Hostel have threatened to kill workers at Aerial King, National Plumbers, and Pelham Products. Numsa members at Wattville, Merafe and Nancefield, George Goch, Denver, Kwesine have been threatened with death of they do not leave Numsa... P Ntuli foreman at Natal Steel Windows was killed and a placard relating to the strike left on his body...[144]

In addition, strikers were harassed by management through a variety of tactics. Many workers were arrested, only to be released later when the union reminded the company that it was a legal strike. Worker lock-outs were common whilst the use of strike replacement labour was routine. Some employers used desperate measures to bring such labour into the factories. A shopsteward from Zinc Africa on the East Rand recalls,

> The company used to take a bakkie out with big bags of sand. The company used to go out and find those who were looking for a job, and put them inside the bag... So one afternoon they took the scab labour in a forklift to the next door factory... But one of our members saw them going through to that factory and chased them, and cursed them, and asked them `How did you get inside the factory`. They told us that they were brought inside the bags. So now we are watching all the trucks that are coming and going. So they see that we are too clever. So the personnel manager used to carry three workers in the boot of his car to bring them inside the company. So we tried to warn them not to come in while we were on strike because you are disturbing our strategy.[145]

Strikers would keep watch at factory gates night and day to try and prevent the entry of scab labour.

Another shopsteward recalls wryly that, "At that time it was so cold, we used to burn tyres. They say that we are intimidating passers-by. White people see the fire outside the factory. They say that we are threatening people by fire. This was the time of necklacing.[146] They call the police who would come and warn us." [147] Three weeks after the launch of the action, Seifsa sent the union a letter detailing that the strike was `non-functional to collective bargaining.`[148] The same afternoon, a court interdict preventing the strike was issued alleging that the union had not followed the correct balloting procedures. This was one of the strike-breaking tactics that employers had discussed at the 1990 workshop where they learnt from legal counsel that through a careful accumulation of videos, tapes, and photographs they could build up evidence of illegal procedures. Legal papers alleged that Seifsa members had gathered documentary information that demonstrated a range of irregularities in different companies in strike balloting procedures. These included the complaints that temporary and non-union members had participated in the ballot, separate 'yes' and 'no' ballot boxes were utilised, ballot boxes were not sealed, there was no control over the distribution of ballot papers, more votes had been cast than numbers of eligible members, some employees cast more than one vote, members were not identified prior to the distribution of ballot forms, lack of privacy during voting, voters not placing ballot papers in the box themselves, ballot papers left on the table after voting or shopstewards keeping ballot papers for up to 30 hours before handing them over to Numsa head office and so on.[149] A flood of ultimatums from employers followed alleging that the strike was illegal, and workers must return to work immediately. Strikers were informed through company notice boards, often in patronising tones, about the irregularities, "Management is most disappointed to learn of the irregularities and also that Numsa could not show that a majority of its members voted in favour of strike action."[150]

Numsa released a statement deploring employers' underhand methods. It pointed out that for some years it had requested Seifsa to negotiate facilities for ballots to no avail but it had nevertheless, although not required by law, permitted employers to observe ballots, which they had turned against the union. The union was angered that employers used a legal technicality against an action which was overwhelmingly supported by thousands of aggrieved employees, "By using purely technical devices, they have threatened the future of collective bargaining."[151] it remonstrated. It complained, with some justification, about the unreality of the judgement and the unrealistic requirements of the LRA, "There are in our view very few unions which can comply in all respects with these requirements, for instance, that a register of the names and ID numbers of members be available for balloting." It underscored the impracticality of the situation by pointing out that even employers themselves, with all their resources, had been unable to provide union membership figures, despite stop-order schedules, which had been requested 18 months previously by the Metal Industry Provident Fund. Furthermore, it claimed, Seifsa's recent lockout ballot had been "riddled with irregularities of a much more serious nature than those alleged in Numsa's strike ballot." Fear of mass dismissals, however, forced the National Strike

Committee to call for a return to work and it requested that companies extend the time so that they could inform striking workers. There was immediate resistance from strikers to this union directive and many argued that the union should disregard the interdict and continue the action Numsa's leadership struggled to persuade them to return in a disciplined manner as strikers reacted with anger to the employers' tactic. Mass dismissals however sent workers reluctantly back to work. A shopsteward from Bronle Castings commented, "And going back to work we were divided fighting each other."[152]

The union was convinced that the mass dismissals strategy had originated, and was co-ordinated by, Anglo American companies in Seifsa. Two weeks into the strike Anglo's Scaw Metals wrote a letter to the union alleging that "their business was suffering permanent damage and that the strike was no longer functional to collective bargaining."[153] Soon after Seifsa sent a letter to the union reiterating the allegation, and informing the union that they were advising employer members to take legal action to end the strike. Many smaller employers endorsed the Anglo approach although other larger companies such as Gencor and Dorbyl were reluctant to adopt this strategy. Fanaroff responded angrily,

> Anglo is very influential. It not only has a lot of subsidiaries, it also has immense power over other companies because it has big contracts with them and holds shares in many, such as Powertech... They determine policy and they can enforce that policy.
>
> It is much easier for us to have a general strike than it is for us to win an industry strike at the present time...There is overwhelming evidence that Anglo American initiated and drove the strategy of crushing our strike by mass dismissals. That is of course what Anglo did in 1987 as well to the miners... [154]
>
> ...The way things stand at the moment, Anglo and other major capitalist enterprises have the power to smash us up on the ground when we come to an industry-based fight... That is why we want Anglo American split up. They are too powerful in our society as a whole.[155]

A large number of workers were dismissed, and years later the union's legal department was still battling to obtain compensation, or reinstatement. In 1995, for example, Numsa was fighting six cases in Gauteng alone including at Wubbling Apache where 40 workers had been dismissed, and at Boart MSA, VRN Steel, Cobra Watertech, WG Davey and Ranbright Steel.[156] Chris Lloyd believed that the union was partly to blame for the dismissals because of its internal weak structures. "A number of our members, because our communications are not great, were never told and they kept on striking after the date that the interdict took effect. And as a result they were dismissed, and we're still fighting that. To this day, 1996, we're having occupations of this office by members who were dismissed in 1992 because of that strike interdict."[157] Management responses however, differed. At some companies the union won re-instatement, at others compensation, and at yet others companies turned their back on workers forever. In the face of unemployment some dismissed shopstewards fought on doggedly for years. Steven Rathebe, chair of the shop steward committee at GM Vincent in Johannesburg, was dismissed with 226 co-workers. He returned to Lesotho, but continued to co-ordinate report-back

meetings on progress to all dismissed strikers from the company. In 1996 he recounted this story which was reminiscent of bitter struggles that Mawu had conducted a decade before,

> I come up to Johannesburg a few days before the court case. I try and get the union to make a pamphlet for me and then I go to the taxi ranks, to the train, and other places where I know that the workers or their friends will be, and tell them when the general meeting will take place. Workers come from as far as Transkei, KwaZulu Natal and Pietersburg. We usually get good attendance but I know of at least four workers who have passed away since we were dismissed...
>
> For a year after I was dismissed, I stayed with my aunt in Tembisa. I tried to help her but after a while my money ran out. It was difficult for me to stay on, I was embarrassed to be using her money all the time. I tried looking for a job but found nothing. I have been trying to find a job since then. I had worked for GM Vincent for twenty two years as a labourer but all I have is a Std 6 and every factory I try says they want skilled workers...My wife had to find a job in Bethlehem. She does domestic work and stays with her mother and our three children. Our eldest son is staying with a cousin in Vereeniging and doing Form 5. I am living in Lesotho and looking after my sister's two children... We've been growing potatoes and selling them but now the winter is coming it will be difficult. Sometimes I go across to Fouriesburg to buy milk and then resell it in Lesotho. [158]

Repercussions and meaning of strike

The strike was a terrible defeat. Chris Lloyd, an Australian who had previously worked in an Australian metal union, and had joined Numsa immediately prior to the strike, gave a critical outsider's view of what he considered a series of blunders by Numsa leadership. He was puzzled by the fact that Numsa had committed itself to a strike in the middle of a major recession, "It was a badly timed strike... in Australia you never called strikes in the middle of a recession because you know it means retrenchments... The industry was cutting back membership, and we lost in our manufacturing industry 150 000 people during that 1992/93 period."[159] Furthermore, in such a context he could not comprehend the nature of the demands that Numsa was advancing. Firstly, he believed that conducting a high wage strike, where Numsa was demanding "at least 20 per cent above what employers would pay" was madness in a recessionary environment, "That is one of the lessons of that strike. Numsa started to realise when it calls a strike, it better think of how the economy is going, because it is not going to get much money out of employers, it is going to get only retrenchments..." Secondly he believed that the demands bore little relation to what was transpiring in the country at the time and in the absence of such a context the union's all or nothing approach left it with no plan with which to retreat,

> So you're struck by this lack of any coherent thinking about when we pull strikes out, and what we go on strike about... The period of the `92 strike was the beginning of transitional democracy. The Kempton Park talks[160] were advanced enough to realise that now we had to build the economy and not destroy... What struck me when I sat in on the last round of negotiations was that it came down to a couple of percentage points. That was the settlement. And if you're going to pull out a big number of members on strike you want to be more sophisticated about what you want out of a settlement, so that if you don't get more money, you get something else.[161]

These were damning criticisms but it must be said that Numsa's base was substantially not attuned to such a logic. The leadership's shift from resistance to reconstruction had not yet filtered down to general membership which was still focussed on the destruction of apartheid which was still under negotiation at Kempton Park. For workers, who had suffered the dehumanising system for years, there was no inevitability to the end of the monolithic apartheid state that had deformed so much of their lives. If anything, worker consciousness was fixed in a nihilistic mode where its aim was the destruction of apartheid no matter the consequences. A shopsteward from Scaw Metals, for example, viewed the strike in this way,

> The way that black people are living in South Africa, even now, if we go on strike, regardless of whether we lose or win a particular strike, to us black people it is a victory no matter how many weeks or months we stay unpaid.
>
> For us as employees, we say that the money that we are getting from them in one day, or a week, or month, we are getting nothing. So even if we stay out for one or two months, to us even if the court says the strike is illegal, it is still a victory because we are getting nothing from the companies. The employers are losing more than us, they are expecting profits, they are giving us change from the money that they are making. So if I lose R800 a month, how much is the employer losing? Millions? Because I'm making the profits for him!
>
> There are people who have been working here for 35 years or more and they can't even afford to buy a bicycle.[162]

Furthermore the unions had been operating in a recessionary environment for years and had in fact grown in power and numbers throughout this period despite conducting repeated illegal strikes which carried a high risk of dismissal. Innes has pointed out that, "What was most remarkable about the intensity of worker action [from 1989 to end of 1991] ... was that the latter part of the 1980s was a period of low economic growth, characterised by rising levels of unemployment...While conditions of economic stagnation, such as South Africa has experienced recently, are usually accompanied by a scaling down of trade union militancy, this was certainly not the case in South Africa's major black union groups."[163] This view is not held by all labour commentators however. Crouch comments that periods of economic expansion are often characterised by short strikes and periods of recession by fewer, longer more desperate strikes.[164] Although the `fewer` would certainly not apply here, the engineering strike certainly fell into the category of a longer more desperate action. Workers were attuned to taking action in an hostile environment and their struggle had always been conducted in the context of being citizens without rights in an apartheid state. Their struggle was as much a struggle for dignity and human rights in the workplace, and the exhilaration of asserting such rights in the face of the white man, as it was about the desperation to earn a decent wage.

In this context Lloyd's comparison to strikes conducted by Australian labour who enjoyed full

citizenship was, on one level, simplistic. Workers won nothing, but Hyman has pointed out the importance in political terms of one side refusing to compromise beyond a specific point which "can exert a profound influence over subsequent negotiations."[165] He cites Ross in this regard, "A 60 day strike over 2 cents an hour my be irrational in the economic lexicon, but viewed as political behaviour it may have all the logic of survival."[166] He sees a political and organisational rationality in prolonged worker action where the gains are less than the losses in the action. He believes there are collective gains for the union which follow from the demonstration of power.

On another level however it was clear, as Lloyd pointed out, that the union leadership could not continue to pursue a strategy where its memberships' job security and income were further threatened. To ignore this was to ignore the a priori reason for the union's existence which was to protect its membership from the excesses of capitalism. Numsa's leadership believed it had no option but to redirect the union's agenda and to explore alternative strategies for securing jobs and decent working conditions in the context of an emerging liberalised economy where global competition further threatened jobs and working conditions. In addition, with the dawning of a new political dispensation there was the possibility of new spaces opening up for labour to exploit. In an interview in 1992 Fanaroff explained the options with which he believed the union was confronted,

> We really face *two options* in the metal industry which is in crisis at present. One option is to reduce real wages, cut costs, and retrench workers, and see that as a means of saving the metal industry and making it more competitive. This is the old apartheid option.
>
> The other option is to recognise that the major problem in the industry is incompetent management. Their ability to manage in a competitive environment is very limited. The issue of workplace skills, motivation and working conditions, of industrial strategies, and managerial strategies, and competence are far more important to the future of the metal industry than cutting real wages.
>
> The Numsa strike can be seen in that light . We did not succeed in our battle to stop a cut in real wages... It means that we are going to be fighting a battle on industrial policy. Do we go for an
> industrial policy which can lead to significant improvement in efficiency and industry without prejudicing workers?
>
> Or do we follow the employers' approach - cut wages and retrench people and hope to God that's going to somehow save your industry? [167]

These were options where in essence there was little choice involved for the union.

5. Conclusion

The 1989 Nicisemi negotiations marked a new bargaining era for Numsa. Numsa was now the dominant union on the Industrial Council and this brought pressures to wield power with responsibility. It now held the responsibility to take the bargaining institution seriously and to bargain with the aim of

coming to an acceptable compromise which would result in the signing of the Main Agreement. The leadership of the union embraced this opportunity as one in which it could seriously bargain deep structural changes to the industry.

Leadership's aim was reflected in the union's structures through the creation of Research & Development Groups in order to deepen its understanding of Numsa's industries and to reframe its bargaining demands. The union attempted to create a worker led research facility which was informed by a worker perspective and memberships' knowledge of their industries. The RDGs represented the beginnings of an alternative bargaining programme and were to inform much of the content of Numsa's new agenda. The union was not however able to make this information available to general membership and by 1992 the concept had been abandoned. Erwin conceded that "…attempting to make very basic information available to the ground - that was always our biggest failure. We never did that as much as we should have."[168]

A growing gap in how the union's aims were viewed was becoming apparent between the leadership and the union's base. Union negotiators embraced the opportunity to take responsibility for the bargaining direction of the institution in which it had become a dominant negotiating partner. They immediately attempted to engage employers on broader issues concerning the restructuring of the metal engineering industry. They seized the opportunity to address the structural crisis in the industry and to discuss such issues as job losses and the skills crisis. Meanwhile membership were expressing a growing frustration with the lack of monetary benefits emanating from these negotiations despite the union's advance in narrowing the wage gap between skilled and un/semi-skilled workers and a consistent increase in the minimum wage. Despite too, its remarkable record in the area of extending workers' benefits, rights and control in such areas as paid maternity leave, free pap smears, access to the Metal Industries Medical Fund, the restructuring of the Sick Fund to the benefit of membership, a reduction in working hours, the extension of the Main Agreement to the homelands, the creation of the Metal Industries Provident Fund and worker representation on pension boards. In the context of a society in the throes of enormous upheaval the slow, incremental and strategised approach of union negotiators was at odds with memberships' mood and the perception of its needs.

Thus the union leadership was thrown into the paradoxical position of attempting to engage employers in a more creative process of building a viable and sustainable manufacturing , whilst experiencing a continuous pressure from below to engage in adversarial bargaining. The 1992 strike ended this untenable balancing act. By the end of the strike it was apparent to both employers and the union that there had to be a different approach to industrial relations. Neither side could risk the recurrence of such devastating action to their industries or to their membership. Numsa leadership would have to educate

its base on the necessity of adopting a new way of thinking and a new way of doing. It was the end of 1992 and yet the union had not been able to popularise, or to clearly define, its bargaining platform which its president had set out in his 1989 National Bargaining Conference speech, "Our demands", he observed "must raise political consciousness and help to build organisation and mobilisation to move to a new democratic South Africa...Our collective bargaining must look to the future as well as the present. We must lay the foundations now of a restructured economy. We must enter our first National Bargaining Conference then bearing in mind both our long-term and short-term aims and goals."[169] The 1992 strike was however a turning point. It marked in effect, the end of the Mawu bargaining strategy. As national organiser Bobbie Marie commented, "Now the key issue is not 50c across the board. The first research data showed that the industry was declining. You've got to change your strategy. And Bernie [Fanaroff] became unpopular for that, and he argued against the militancy. He said `you can't go on striking, you're going to destroy this industry.`"[170] The following chapters explore how Numsa radically revised its bargaining agenda in accordance with these insights.

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Chapter 8

Restructuring industry, restructuring bargaining 1993

1. Introduction

"Numsa wants to approach bargaining as a process and not an event any more!"[1] declared *Numsa Info* in the wake of the 1992 engineering strike when industrial relations in the industry had reached a devastating low and severe losses had been suffered on both sides. Fanaroff had warned of the dangers of such adversarial strikes destroying the industry but the limits to this kind of bargaining were also revealing themselves in other ways.

In Mawu, and in the early years of Numsa, the union had focussed on building power in the industry to force changes on the Nicisemi. This it had achieved through the launch of a focussed living wage campaign which differed from the earlier broad mobilising campaigns of Mawu and Fosatu. For the first time, the union put dedicated energy and resources into building local structures which guided by national demands and national co-ordination welded a national metalworker identity. This approach had a dynamic impact on the union as metal workers flocked to join and Numsa established itself as the dominant union in the industry. By the early 1990s however the union was reaching the limits to this approach and as national organiser Bobby Marie explained, it could no longer sustain this tactic, "We did it for a while, and it exhausted us because the logistics were enormous. We did achieve some significant things but it reached its limit."[2]

By the early 1990s, as has been noted, Numsa's "long shopping list of demands" was rendering negotiations overly long and complex. Smith recalls, "They have this preliminary meeting with all the unions present, and we basically motivate our proposal - this goes on for weeks! And the serious bargaining only takes place towards the end of June, and the agreement is about to expire, now people start getting serious!"[3] In negotiations at least half of these demands would be dropped. Furthermore, after signing the agreement, there was very little time prior to the end of the year to implement what had been successfully negotiated. According to Schreiner, "You'd start at the beginning of the year, until about August/ September finalising, then three months and you're back on the treadmill."[4] The union was caught in a cycle of demanding, dropping demands, and then reiterating demands the following year, with no time to implement.

It was this frustrating cycle, combined with the defeat that the union suffered in 1992 in engineering,

that motivated it to rethink its bargaining strategy. Its response was to advance the idea of a three year agreement which would allow for a reasonable bargaining period and for time to implement after the signing of the agreement. Thus what became known as 'the three year bargaining programme' originated as an organising tool. Later, however, the union linked the programme to Numsa's emerging ideas on restructuring the metal industry more broadly, believing as Fanaroff expressed it, that "... this industry has got structural problems that cannot be resolved simply by retrenching people and by paying others less."[5]

2. Debating restructuring

From 1990 onwards the union began holding policy workshops on the state of the South African economy prompted largely by the escalating numbers of retrenchments on the shopfloor and the possibility of a new democratic dispensation. These discussions inevitably led the union to an exploration of how the metal industry was organised and it became clear to participants that different levels of the economy were linked - the national or macro-economic level, the industry level, and the shopfloor level. It would therefore not suffice for a bargaining programme to address issues at the workplace level alone. All levels of the economy needed to be addressed in collective bargaining negotiations and this was made possible by the existence of centralised bargaining forums in the industry. It was from these discussions that a union vision of a future South African economy began to emerge.

The union's argument developed along the following lines. The apartheid state was in its last throes squeezed by an economy that was in imminent danger of collapse. In the 1960s South Africa's growth rate of an average of 3.2 was higher than most developed countries. During the 1970s however its growth rate was lower than the latter. In the 1980s the economy was showing a negative growth of - 1.5. Between 1980 - 1885 the economy shrank. This trend continued into the early 1990s.[6] In the early 1990s the Nationalist government finally succumbed to the impact of anti-apartheid sanctions against it, in particular the international banks refusal to roll over South Africa's debts. In addition it was spending huge sums to circumvent sanctions and to stockpile large quantities of oil. In an attempt to honour its debts the government pursued the goal of increasing export volumes which would earn it large sums of foreign currency. It was in this process that the country's export economy began to grow and the government, for the first time, abandoned its isolationist policies and initiated a serious process of trading on world markets.

The metal industry experienced this change in macro economic policy through the lowering of tariff

barriers to outside trade. This was a significant reversal as for many years the government had protected its industries from world competition through the imposition of high import duties. This policy had inevitably made South Africa an unattractive trade proposition and had forced international trading partners to retreat. Lloyd, who was one of the main proponents of Numsa's new economic vision, saw it like this, "The employers for 41 years had gone to sleep. They had taken dagga [cannabis] which we call tariff protection, which meant they had no competition from international market places. The second bit of dagga was cheap labour and they had that over a hundred years. The result was they threw cheap labour at it instead of thinking, so that most of our workplaces were overstaffed."[7] In Lloyd's view South Africa had no option but to enter global markets and this entailed the abandonment of protective trade tariffs. Other influential Numsa leaders also endorsed this approach, "We had to get involved in integration processes with the world... Alec Erwin [National Education Secretary] clearly knew that was the case, because while he was education officer of this union, he was actively negotiating tariff reduction programmes with the World Trade Organisation or GATT. That would have major affects on our members, because our members lived in a world that was tightly insulated from that."[8]

Lowering tariffs, and opening South Africa up to world competition, inevitably held many dangers for workers, the greatest danger being a further escalation of job losses. Erwin believed however that whatever the dangers, the South African economy had to enter global markets,

> I think the bulk of us in Numsa came to the conclusion that unless you can make the adjustments required by the pressures of globalization that your union movement would probably die. We came to this conclusion speaking to Germans, Swedes, Australians, Brazilians, and we could watch it in front of our eyes. We watched the rationalisations, retrenchments, and losing retrenchment battle after retrenchment battle. You could watch the British trade union movement responding very badly to this, and the Germans responding well, so you could see the difference between static unionism and dynamic unionism.[9]

Once the union leadership accepted a macroeconomic framework which embraced the inevitability of South Africa entering competitive world markets, it began to investigate global economic trends. Union delegates at workshops heard university researchers talk about the restructuring of the work process in the world economy. They heard how, in the past ten years, significant changes had occurred in how successful economies operated, and how a new system of production had emerged which they termed 'post-Fordism'. This new system marked an end to the Fordist system of mass production which capitalists had employed since the 1920s, and involved the use of important kinds of new technology - notably computer technology. Computer linked design, production, and marketing, had made productive activities quick and flexible. In a highly competitive global context the countries that performed best in world trade were those which were able to produce a wide range of high quality goods, and could adjust rapidly to changing patterns in consumer demand. The new computer

technology frequently accompanied innovative ways of organising work. New concepts of 'participative management' had emerged which entailed higher levels of worker involvement in the production process. Many of these ideas had emanated from Japan where participative styles, such as Quality Circles, Just-In-Time, and Green Areas, were common. These techniques aimed to increase efficiency, productivity, and quality by encouraging workers to employ their own ideas and skills in the productive process. The workforce was seen as a resource working in creative co-operation with management and no longer as an inevitable, but tiresome, and sometimes troublesome, expense. In this system skilled workers who were essential or `core` to the production process received good pay and benefits, and enjoyed high levels of job security because they were not easily replaceable. Workers with low levels of skill received none of these benefits and were highly vulnerable.[10]

What Numsa workers were not explicitly told, however, was that underpinning the new systems of production that accompanied globally competitive strategies, was a neo-liberal ideology. It was an ideology that permitted global capitalism to roam unconstrained across the world in search of the cheapest and most productive labour. In order to compete on the global market workers would have to work 'smarter', harder, and greatly increase their productivity. Although the issue of ideology was fudged, a union which subscribed to a socialist ideology, was not likely to embrace such strategies without building in a variety of protective constraints. As a union that endorsed workers' control its aim was to ensure that whatever productive system was introduced, workers should have a substantial say in it. As Smith observed in 1990, "The union has adopted the slogan 'One Industry, One Country, Forward to Workers' Control' for this year 1990. We are not just fighting for narrow economic demands but for something broader, for workers' control. The struggle for worker control in a future South African economy is taking place now. Through our collective bargaining we are raising demands for the re-structuring of industry."[11]

Alec Erwin, a trained economist played a leading role in these discussions and was later to become Cosatu's chief economic advisor. It was he who outlined the ideological content of a future economic development plan. He contended that any future government needed to be driven by the fundamental goal of eliminating the deep inequalities that cleaved South African society - the inequality between owners and workers, the employed and the unemployed, and the racism that accompanied these relations. The solution, he argued, was a democratically-planned socialist economy. He dismissed a social democratic model as too expensive for a future South African state to implement, and discarded a free market capitalist mode of production as being unable to resolve the deep structural problems that plagued the South African economy. A planned economy, in his analysis, involved the formulation of a detailed strategy to develop South Africa's core industries and a systematic movement away from a high-cost/low wage system to a high growth/high wage economy. Initially, he believed, the

restructuring of pivotal industries would occur in a mixed economy where both socialist and capitalist elements would co-exist. In his view however, it was essential in this stage of development to ensure that employers were prevented from utilising economic restructuring as a means of increasing profits via a high productivity/low wage route. Any profits from increased production resulting from the restructuring of industry should be directed at the creation of better working conditions and decent wages, in other words `a high wage growth path`. Furthermore through state intervention, companies should be encouraged to invest profits in new economic activities which would generate new jobs.[12]

Over successive workshops Numsa further developed its policies and during the course of these discussions it became apparent that a significant transition was taking place in how Numsa perceived its role - a transition from the politics of resistance, to the politics of co-operation and reconstruction. If South Africa could not escape global restructuring, the leadership argued, a union-led economic development strategy would only succeed if unions were strong organisationally and had the political power to influence state policy. The success of a 'post-Fordist' production system in South Africa, it believed, would depend on high levels of state planning in the economy in order to ensure that economic growth complemented national development strategies that benefited the poor and disadvantaged. What was necessary, in the union's view, was to ensure that a policy of `growth through redistribution`[13] was adopted. Development programmes, for example, such as providing millions of people with housing, could provide jobs, stimulate the economy, offer a training ground for the unskilled, and ensure that the homeless had reasonable accommodation. Thus the union envisaged a high growth/ high wage strategy through engagement on international markets which involved an export-led strategy and which would simultaneously be accompanied by a development strategy that would stimulate the domestic economy.[14]

In the process of refining its policies on economic restructuring, participants in Numsa workshops became ever more convinced of the importance of the labour movement in developing its own programme about how to restructure the economy and develop the country, and on how to ensure that the wealth was equitably re-distributed in a democratic South Africa. They believed that the labour movement was sufficiently powerful to influence both current and future governments, through a process of negotiation, to adopt its economic programme. At a workshop in 1991 Numsa delegates discussed the concept of a reconstruction accord between trade unions and the ANC as the likely government of a future democratic South Africa. Such an accord would function as an agreement on an economic strategy for national development and would in addition incorporate the interests of civic and rural organisations. It would lend content to a formal alliance which had been forged between Cosatu and the ANC the previous year and would guarantee labour a central voice in government policy in a post-apartheid South Africa. Business would then be approached to endorse this reconstruction

programme and a tri-partite programme on restructuring the economy would be framed and would be constructively driven by the most powerful forces in the society.[15] A large part of this reconstruction programme would entail an agreement on a range of new laws and the creation and restructuring of a number of state institutions to support a more equitable economic system. As Fanaroff explained at the time,

> In the past, we looked at labour law. Obviously there are a wide range of other laws that affect the labour movement. We want laws that help democratisation in the economy, anti-trust laws, democratisation of media. All those things are important. Labour market institutions and statutory bodies is another very important area. Labour market institutions up to now have not really been vehicles for the formulation of industry policy, but they should be. There are other statutory bodies - research councils, consumer councils - which need to be beefed up or restructured. They need to become something very different, much more active and capable of dealing with policy debates.
>
> We need a legal framework that enables you to develop rights on the shopfloor, and in the company much further than previously. You would perhaps want to have rights that facilitate the development of democratic practices in business. If those rights affect ownership, so be it.[16]

The union was adopting a negotiated vision of a new society, one in which all forces, including capital, could participate. This approach appeared as a radical departure from its former strategies which were pitted against the rapacity of South African capital. Indeed, in many ways they were a radical departure. Yet in other ways this co-operative approach which involved compromises was consistent with the way Numsa and unions from the Fosatu/Cosatu tradition had always operated. It is in the nature of trade unionism that compromises have to be struck in order to uplift working conditions, and Numsa obviously operated within this paradigm. It is for this negotiated accommodation with capital that trade unions have been credited with playing a reformist role in society and Numsa and its predecessors, Naawu and Mawu, were in this sense a movement of incremental reform rather than of radical rupture.[17] This approach was notably different from that of the national liberation movement, headed by the ANC in exile and by its UDF ally internally, which sought a radical overthrow of the apartheid state through the ANC's armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, a call to civic organisations to render townships ungovernable, and a radical abstention from engagement with apartheid institutions. Numsa however, was not opposed to strategic engagement with organs of the state and had made the significant decision in 1983 to enter the engineering industrial council which was symbolic of a gradualist approach to eroding the power of capital and the apartheid state. This approach was not one of accommodation with apartheid in the Tucsa tradition but rather what Webster and Adler have called "radical reform"[18] which involved a militant mobilisation of membership within a legal, non-insurrectionary framework in order to create the space to achieve the long-term goal of ending apartheid and establishing a socialist state. Thus the decision to engage with business, the Nationalist government, and the ANC was consistent with this radical reformist tradition which involved Numsa,

and Cosatu, coming to the table with a carefully strategised reconstruction programme

It was within this ideological framework that the union turned its attention to conveying its newly formulated policies to business, government, and the ANC. A series of tri-partite (employers, government, unions) forums followed. Numsa engaged in both industry-specific forums and in affiliate-wide Cosatu forums where it often drove the process. Such forums ranged from restructuring the National Manpower Commission, to housing, peace, and pension structures. At one stage it was participating in 26 different forums. According to Erwin these forums allowed Numsa and Cosatu the space to explore issues from new perspectives and to advance their programmes,

> What it meant in practice was that you needed space to move. To get that space you had to engage with capital, and the then government…So this idea of forums emerged out of that, get space, we've got a strong argument, capital has its own problems, so they will not be averse to a terrain of discussion. We're not strong enough to stay out of this and fight a full-on war and get murdered. We really need to engage and understand these processes, understand industries, engage with government, we have to have long-term strategies.[19]

Erwin had referred to "...the bulk of us in Numsa" coming to the conclusion that unless adjustments to the pressures of globalization were accommodated the union movement would die. It was not clear however to whom 'the bulk of us' referred as the new strategies that Erwin had outlined were not immediately embraced or understood by much of the leadership or membership. Erwin himself acknowledged this when he emphasised the importance of introducing leadership to the necessity of understanding Numsa's industries, "This is not just done by negotiations, the investment decisions of the auto industry across the world shape our investment decisions, whether we like it or not. We've got to understand steel, and understand consumer durables. So you've got to bring your leadership to these high levels."[20] People in the union were however often reluctant to engage with the new ideas that a sector of its leadership was embracing. Smith discovered this when he returned to the union after a period of research in the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP),

> I was now armed at least with ISP research. I understood some of the stuff. And would take the stuff to people. But there was still a lot of resistance. People would say, oh fuck this ISP stuff - it's reformist shit, it talks about competitiveness. And I was trying to say `What it does, it just gives you an understanding of the industry. At least just understand the pressures that the industry is under.` And people still didn't appreciate the strategy.[21]

Approaching industry with alternative strategies to develop their sectors proved an even more arduous task. At various Numsa workshops, top businessmen in the metal sector were invited to present their plans for the industry. These included businessmen such as Lesley Boyd chairman of Anglo American's Highveld Steel, Richard Savage director of Altron, Theo van den Bergh managing director of Toyota and a number of other Seifsa representatives. They took no responsibility for the state of the economy and complained that sanctions and labour action were the causes of the economic crisis. Delegates learnt that large parts of the metal industry were reaping profits of 30- 35 per cent in 1989

whilst productive investment in new ventures was steadily falling and few jobs were created. They also learnt that business leaders only invested 0,2 per cent on research and development in contrast, say to Japan, where companies spent on average 5 - 6 per cent of their profits on research. They argued that economic growth required co-operation between unions and business and industrial and political stability. On further exploration, however, it became apparent that their vision of co-operation was that the unions accept wage restraint which would allow business to lower costs and thus become internationally competitive.[22] Attitudes to unions and to workers having more say in investment decisions and a greater ownership of the means of production were negative. The response was, "Employers do not trust unions - they have a negative attitude towards unionised workers - unions will have to act responsibly in order to win trust... Management decisions are really best made by management and workers don't have the skills to plan industry. Management are short-term oriented and if they don't see immediate benefits they will not co-operate."[23] It was in the course of this workshop that it emerged that metal employers had no strategy for industrial growth in their sectors. As Schreiner and Erwin observed,

> All the business speakers are asking us to make concessions on co-operation, wage restraint, sanctions, productivity and bargaining levels. But what are you [business] offering us? What are you offering in terms of genuine sharing, and in terms of a strategic vision of growth? (Schreiner)
>
> Business is badly organised to look at these questions. You only look at economic issues from the perspective of your respective companies. For all its weaknesses, the ANC has the most developed economic policy of all parties. (Erwin).[24]

Employers were eloquent however on the problems that beset their industries. They described the downturn in domestic demand for steel products where major consumers such as the mining industry, and parastatals like Eskom and Transnet, were placing fewer orders. The electronics industry had reached the limits of expansion which was largely precipitated by a dramatic reduction in the Post Office budget followed by a decline in orders for telephone and communications equipment. The military sector, which was a large consumer of electronic goods, was also curtailing orders. Furthermore employers bemoaned the lack of growth in the domestic car market, and the difficulty of developing an export market because South African products were too expensive. The government's initiative to reduce import tariffs, they complained, would lead to further decline as cheaper imported goods flooded the market and destroyed domestic industries. In auto, for example, imported cars were cheaper, utilised less petrol, and needed less servicing.[25]

Lloyd, as an outsider, was highly critical of South African auto employers' complacency and lack of understanding of their industries and the economy. He perceived the auto industry thus,

> Massively overstaffed by world comparison, and underskilled. You had this cheap labour, heavily supervised, struggling along happily, because no importer could bring anything in

> without a 200 per cent tariff drop on their tyre or car. So there was no competition, and you had a market you could suck dry. A dumb white market that would buy second hand designs, old fashioned cars. The Japanese and the Germans just recycled their old products on South Africa.[26]

He was equally disparaging of employers' approach to the engineering industry,

> The attitude of the employers was that `we have the brand name, and we've got the market, so why make it? Just import it. We'll make just as much money from importing, so just wind our manufacturing down.` The problem with this, is that in South Africa the major wealth generator is manufacturing. We don't have a developed service sector... All we have is a big manufacturing sector and big mining sector. You can forget the tourist industry - it`s not a tourist industry.[27]

In an attempt to deal with the crisis, the union initiated meetings with employers in industry forums to discuss solutions and to engage on the issue of retrenchments. At the end of 1992, Fanaroff spoke of taking part in,

> Industry growth committees in the engineering industry, in the auto industry, in the electric power industry, in the tyre industry, and we are trying to do that in the motor industry. Numsa is participating in the statutory committee on restructuring of the auto and components industry. We will be participating in the standing committee on electronics as well. So we participate on a number of levels. Those are committees which we believe can be influenced to a point. But they need to be linked to the National Economic Forum[28] and industry-level negotiation. [29]

In order to engage in an informed manner the union had initiated a number of research projects which operated both internal to the union and in external institutions. Industry specific RDGs were investigating the state of their industries whilst the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) based at the University of Cape Town and housing a number of union seconded and labour sympathetic researchers was exploring alternative industrial strategies. [30] Basing itself on these investigations the union argued in these forums for an expansion of South Africa's exports in order to redress the country's balance of payment deficit. The restructuring required to orient industry to this perspective, it realised, would in the short term result in further job losses and ultimately certain industrial sectors would shrink or die whilst new growth sectors would emerge. Furthermore, it believed, that by pursuing the current import-led economic strategy ultimately even more job losses would result. As Lloyd argued,

> There would be a reduction of employment but you wouldn't be increasing your foreign exchange debt, because if you import you have to pay in foreign currency, and you have to get this foreign currency from somewhere. Where are you going to get it from? South Africa is not a developed economy, so unlike Australia where the tourist industry was generating so much foreign exchange you could afford to halve your manufacturing industry. South Africa is a third world economy, and therefore it has to keep its manufacturing alive. So we had to have a strategy that tried to do that...There was always going to be more job losses through us not intervening. [31]

In order to soften the impact of this export-led strategy and to provide for social necessities, the union

argued for the building of a strong domestic economy. Fanaroff explained,

> Resources exist for South Africa to redirect a tremendous amount of spending, which currently is wasted, into things which will serve a political and social purpose on one hand, such as electrification, housing, roads, schools, and which will on the other hand provide a tremendous boost to industry. For example, the effects of electrification on the metal industry - and on small business - would be very substantial... This kind of growth in the domestic market gives industry a boost which enables it to restructure less painfully.[32]

Having formulated its macroeconomic strategy the union turned its attention in industry forums to advocate specific growth strategies. In the engineering sector it promoted the idea of an expansion into the beneficiation of South African's rich resources. South Africa, for example, exported steel, which was converted into stainless steel products overseas and thus the country lost an opportunity to expand its manufacturing base. Through the establishment of a number of large stainless steel plants the possibility existed for the introduction of a viable domestic stainless steel industry. The electronics industry was another sector where the union believed substantial growth was possible if the industry was restructured. Between 1986 and 1990, about 200 000 workers had been retrenched in the industry and the union experienced extreme frustration at the industry's narrow approach to the problem. As Fanaroff observed,

> At the moment, various industries are cutting to the bone to survive in the present day market which is not an appropriate market! For example, the telephone industry is cutting capacity so it can remain profitable in the present day limited market. But clearly, for social and political reasons, that is not the appropriate market. They should be gearing up to reach a much larger market in future - the millions who do not have telephones. That is why we are arguing to generate infra structural projects that will provide massive markets for companies and enable them to restructure.[33]

Numsa became an active participant in the Standing Committee on Electronics (SCE) which was established by the Department of Trade and Industry to develop a future strategy for the electronics industry. The union participated in a number of SCE sub-committees in order to investigate the restructuring of the industry including Strategy Formulation, Telecommunications, Smart Cards, Projects of National Importance, and Technological Support for Education.[34]

Numsa also initiated a process of restructuring South Africa's parastatal corporations which were large, cumbersome and often inefficient. In order to increase efficiency levels the union argued for a higher degree of workers' control and participation in decision-making. It selected Eskom as a pilot project for restructuring and initiated, and participated in, the National Electrification Forum. This was constituted in May 1993 and comprised 200 delegates which included representatives from trade unions, the Association of Municipal and Electrical Undertakings, government and the SA Agricultural Union. The Forum was financed by a R 650 000 grant from Eskom and the Independent Development Trust. In the event of the pilot being successful the union hoped to initiate other restructuring projects in

Armscor, Telkom, and Transnet. The Forum aimed to restructure the industry and to investigate how to hasten the provision of electricity in underprivileged urban and rural areas. In the process it hoped to spur "the manufacture of high quality, affordable consumer durables, from metering equipment to appliances, for domestic consumption and export" [35]and thus generate new jobs in the metal industry.[36]

In 1993 Fanaroff noted a marked spirit of co-operation amongst delegates and that the Forum had been "100% free from political chicanery".[37] This was fortunate as the issues under discussion were complex. Delegates had to consider such questions as the financing of the electrification process (it would require 9 billion rand to electrify the entire country) in particular the financing of uneconomic rural projects, and how electrification should mesh with other development projects. It also had to deal with the difficult problem of electrification traditionally being the function of local authorities who financed other municipal services from electricity tariffs. In financing underdeveloped areas such additional resources for other services would no longer be available. A number of in-principle agreements were quickly reached such as the restructuring of the Electricity Council which controlled and made policy for the utility, and an agreement that there should be an assessment of degrees of worker and trade union participation in decision-making at every level of Eskom structures. The union thus hoped to raise the issue of ownership of state corporations and to establish that even if commercial managements operated these parastatals the public should decide policy. In this spirit the Forum aimed at a transparent process which would communicate to its constituency though a regular newsletter.[38]

Thus Numsa engaged in a flurry of activity to seize the opportunity to transform its industries which a society in transition had opened up. Its intention was to heighten workers' control and to harness workers' knowledge of their industries to the benefit the company, workers and the industry as a whole. This would render industry more efficient and relieve workers of paying the price for greater efficiency in the form of redundancy or increased work pressure. The question remained however of how workers could become an on-going resource in the management of their industries and of how to render their services indispensable in the process. The aim was to ensure improved wages and conditions at the same time as providing greater job satisfaction for workers who would become involved in decisions concerning their companies and industries. The union was however aware that although workers had vast reserves of knowledge on their particular section of the shopfloor they needed to broaden their knowledge and skills in order to take more control of their workplaces and industries. The South African education system had left black workers with a legacy of poor education and technical skills and the union turned its attention to addressing this issue. It was in this way that the union came to echo Gramscian ideas distilled in 1919.

Gramsci asserted that workers needed higher levels of knowledge and skills before they could take control of their industries and run them efficiently. In *The Programme of the Workshop Commissars*, which Gramsci participated in drawing up and which was adopted by the first general assembly of the Turin factory commissars in 1919, he addressed this issue. It was in fact more than a programme. It was an exposition of the concepts which would inform the rise of proletarian power through the organisation of factory councils. It outlined eleven duties of the Factory Commissars who were responsible for the economic defence of workers and for social action. These covered the expansion and defence of the rights of labour, preparation for the seizure of power in the factories, and the education of workers. The education of workers was seen in a totally different way. For Gramsci the deficiencies of the Italian education system affected the working class more seriously than any other group in Italian society. Thus the commissars were responsible for organising a school within the factory in order to widen workers' skills in their own trades and in broad industrial functions. In addition to these 'labour schools', the ordinovisti[39] established a "School of Culture and Socialist Propaganda". Here intellectuals, including university professors, conducted lectures and discussions in order to examine the idea of a new state which would replace the Italian liberal state by a system of councils. These were attended by both university students and workers. The ordinovisti also attempted to further workers' education through regular features carried in the *L'Ordine Nuovo*.[40]

Gramsci believed that through a coherent workers' education programme, the proletariat could attain the maturity to seize economic and political power. The education programme was thus closely related to another task of the commissars, namely preparation for the seizure of power. All education was directed to preparing workers to become autonomous producers. The commissars were therefore required to study bourgeois systems of production and wherever possible to suggest ways of accelerating production by eliminating unnecessary work. In Gramsci's analysis, if technical innovations, even those suggested by management, seemed useful in production workers should accept, even at the cost of 'temporary damage' to their interests, providing that industrialists also made sacrifices. The commissars were responsible for studying technical innovations proposed by employers and for discussing suggestions with workers. It was their responsibility to ensure professional training of workers and to compel management to create an integrated system of education for apprentices. Commissars had to obtain precise intelligence on the value of capital invested in their workshops, and evaluate this in relation to all known costs. In this manner workers, through the guidance of commissars, would come to think of themselves not as wage earners but as producers who had a holistic awareness of themselves in the process of production, "in all its levels from the factory to the nation to the world."[41] According to Gramsci this expanded vision was the best guarantee for the transformation of the existing capitalist system into a socialist, and ultimately communist, one.[42]

Now 70 years later, Numsa leadership were faced with the same concerns as they struggled to develop an integrated training strategy which would address both the issue of control and of remuneration. Its concerns, and the programme it developed, were in many ways similar to those propounded by Gramsci. Gramsci, like Numsa, advanced a gradualist approach to seizing power. He believed workers needed to be carefully prepared to expropriate and manage industry in order to secure a long-term victory of the proletariat through efficient production. He was criticised by other PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano), and later Italian Communist Party, members as being a reformist and not a revolutionary for his emphasis on the role of factory councils in technical education. They argued that such an approach would only assist the capitalists in achieving greater productive outputs at the expense of workers. Gramsci's emphasis however derived from an intention to prepare workers thoroughly for their future hegemony over other social classes. This hegemony he believed would only be assured by the economic, technical, political, and cultural superiority of workers over other classes. He abjured an approach which advocated that a revolution in economic relations could be brought about by striking a single decisive blow at the heart of the capitalist system. Numsa, through its Naawu and Mawu legacy, had also adopted an incremental approach to building socialism. An emphasis on developing workers' skills through the training that management would provide, the utilisation of workers' knowledge of their industries to transform them, the employment of printed matter to inform, raise debates and educate workers through such publications as *Numsa News*, *Numsa Bulletin*, *Information Pamphlets*, and *Numsa Info*, the use of education seminars and workshops to debate issues, the utilisation of outside experts to augment knowledge of its industries in order to develop industrial, political, and economic policies which were geared to prepare members to play a greater role in the economy, closely resembled Gramsci's ideas. There were however major differences between how their goals should be attained. Gramsci had welcomed innovative technology that took the burden of heavy labour away from workers. Seventy years later the issue had become considerably more complex. Firstly, sophisticated technologies were rapidly replacing large numbers of workers, and the union while admitting that such changes enhanced the speed and quality of production, also confronted escalating retrenchments as a result thereof. It thus had to address the issue of how to attain full employment more seriously. Secondly, Gramsci envisaged the factory councils coming under the leadership of a Communist Party. He believed that the Party could not be separated from mass action and that it must lead the revolutionary action of the proletariat. Thus, whilst the building of factory councils continued, he turned his attention to the task of renewing an Italian Communist Party. To this end he outlined a more restricted role for the Party than envisaged by the PSI and the later Italian Communist Party (PCI). He envisaged a Party which was controlled from the bottom and whose role was limited to the seizure of political power. It was in the factory, he believed, that the revolution would be made, and the Party existed to give political expression to attaining workers' control of their factories and ultimately the economy. The Party was not to regard itself as 'tutor' but as the 'agent' of the factory councils.[43]

Such ideas had attracted Mawu theorists strongly to Gramscian ideas in the early days. Now in the early 1990s Numsa had not formulated a detailed programme for the incremental seizure of proletarian power, nor had its leadership seriously engaged in the creation of a Communist Party which strove towards a new state which was "... typically proletarian into which flow institutional experiences of the oppressed class..."[44] The ANC and SACP had been unbanned and it was to these organisations that it was allied and neither in any real sense endorsed this Gramscian vision of the role of the Communist Party. The ANC was a nationalist organisation that accommodated a wide range of differing political views and the SACP, its Communist ally, had evolved very much in its shadow. Large sections of Numsa's membership may have still been committed to a socialist outcome but the union, and Cosatu, had forged alliances which did not advocate the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a generation who had experienced the recent collapse of Eastern Bloc communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Moreover it was many years since the union's leadership had immersed itself in Gramscian ideas. Even if an incrementalist approach to the attainment of socialism was being advocated the leadership were not framing it as a revolutionary struggle for proletarian ownership of factories, industries and the economy. Yet issues of worker's control and ownership were still very much alive in the union's collective identity and when the Australian example presented itself, it was readily grasped as a means to attaining greater control of its industries in the manner that Gramsci had conceived of training and educating workers to take power. Numsa turned its attention to evolving a comprehensive programme of training for transformation, training to augment workers' control.

3. Training for Transformation

Introduction

This chapter has shown how the union's leadership embraced a post-Fordist macro-economic framework that assumed that South Africa had no choice but to abandon protective tariffs and to enter competitive world markets. Following on the adoption of this policy, a number of related policy developments ensued. In order to compete successfully on the global markets post-Fordist economic strategists stressed the importance of a skilled, flexible and resourceful labour market. This approach resonated with both capital and labour in South Africa where business was experiencing a desperate shortage of skilled labour, and unskilled black workers hungered for good education and training in the belief that this would afford better life opportunities.

It was in this context that the union turned its attention to the question of developing a skilled labour force in the metal industry. The issue of education and training thus became a central demand in its three year bargaining programme which was strongly associated with the union's emerging ideas on

industrial restructuring. Marie recalls the centrality of education and training in the bargaining programme, "The restructuring [of industry] was the three year bargaining programme. It went beyond having the power to strike at the IC [Nicisemi]. It shifted from that, to the power to transform the IC and the industry. What Adrienne [Bird] was presenting was a complete transforming of the industry and Numsa was going to take this and transform it."[45] Regional educator, Adrienne Bird, together with a group of shopstewards in the training RDG, were about to introduce a new approach to industrial training and in the process would unlock a radical new approach for the union.

From sweeper to engineer

During 1989 the Training RDG investigated the state of training in all Numsa's sectors and reported its findings to the National Campaigns Committee. In addition it opened discussions with Seifsa on changes to the apprenticeship system and had sent the employer body a proposal on standardising training across Numsa's sectors in order to link all metal ITBs.[46] Thereafter the RDG strategised to engage employers selectively in discussions on training. It invited Seifsa chair, John Angus, to explore with which employers to engage, including those who were most likely to release workers to investigate appropriate training systems. The discussion that followed, according to Bird, unfolded in this manner,

> We did this grand show about how important training was, and why it was, and we want these people off for three months, and we want you to pay, and don't you think this is important, and don't you think its time workers had a say in this stuff? And I honestly think the employers didn't know what had hit them. They had never come across anything like this before... and they did support it by and large. There were a few cranky bastards in the motor industry particularly... but the Siemens of the world just jumped in ... and openly advocated it to other employers.[47]

By the end of 1989, phase one of the project was underway. The RDG assembled 16 shopstewards over a range of skill levels, including technical people and artisans, and, according to Bird " ...ran an absolutely fascinating three weeks. We called on everyone in the country... come and talk to these shopstewards and explain to us, how does the apprenticeship work, how does company training work... And in the evenings around these sessions we'd be reflecting on it `What does it mean? What do we want`... It was great. We started to develop ideas like we didn't want the sudden death of the apprenticeship system."[48] The group emerged with the beginnings of some basic principles to guide it in its approach to training at the centre of which was a major role for unions in the arena of human resource development. It committed the union to addressing all forms of inequality in training, and to ensuring that workers obtained access to general education where this blocked their opportunities for further training. The National Bargaining Conference later captured this idea in the following words, "The bosses tell us that skills are short and that productivity is low. Yet bosses still follow the apartheid system of training. All workers have the right to upgrade their skills. We demand equal and improved training; no discrimination between black and white, young and old, men and women."[49]

The RDG also linked education and training to the union's developing ideas on industrial restructuring and reform of the economy. This included that both the state and employers had a duty to educate and train, and that clear links must be established between formal education, industrial training systems, and other education and training systems.

These proposals were forwarded to Numsa's Central Committee (CC) where they were adopted and an agreement to appoint Bird as a full time national training co-ordinator was reached.[50]

Phase two of the project in 1991 entailed an array of study tours which took worker researchers to various countries to investigate training systems. Here the Australian system had the most impact. As Bird relates, "The metal union in Australia had been doing very interesting work... that was the most amazing thing, like having an injection of energy straight to the head. It was so exciting to talk to these unionists who were several years ahead of us... They came up with a big plan which identified training as a key element, and the metal union had been the key vehicle for giving expression to it. So we learnt a huge amount."[51] In phase three of the project, the researchers returned to reflect on their findings, "we sat and thought and thought and discussed, and talked." The group continually returned to the ideas embodied in the Australian training model which was at core a 'skills-based grading system' whereby workers were remunerated in terms of the skills they utilised. This had an immediate resonance for the researchers because black workers frequently employed a wide range of skills on the job but were not remunerated on this basis. As RDG member Sam Morotoba, explained,

> The skills people do have are often not recognised or compensated. One often sees young white males reading newspapers in their bakkies [small truck] while the so-called unskilled assistants do their jobs. Some of us have had young graduates introduced to us on the shopfloor. We teach them the jobs and soon they become supervisors. Yet we are told we have no skills. When we ask for more pay, we are told we have reached the limit for our grade.[52]

The group's discussions crystallised into ideas which although based on the Australian system took account of the specific circumstances of South Africa. In summary these ideas were that education and training should be geared towards economic growth, higher living and working standards, jobs for all at a living wage in the context of increased productivity, and the production of a better quality of goods. Education and training would be open to all workers and would constitute a continuous part of any job and any working person's life. This would guarantee greater job security which the union captured in the slogan `training not retrenchment`. Training would be linked to an industry grading system, which would progress from the acquisition of broad general skills along a continuum to specialised skills. The shape of any training system would incorporate short courses, or modules, where a worker could complete one module, and then progress to further modules based on national and industry-wide standards. On completion of a module, a worker would receive a national or industry

certificate which would be based on `competency` standards of education. Modules would be linked to an industry grading system, and workers would be remunerated according to their skills. Thus an increase in skill would lead to an increase in pay. In addition the system would allow for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) whereby employees would receive both recognition, and appropriate pay, for the skills they had already acquired and were utilising on the job. Workers would attain skills that were useful in their specific workplace, but such skills would in addition lay the basis for further training and development. In consequence black workers could move up the industry ladder, develop a career path, and attain promotion which had always been denied them, or as the union phrased it, workers could progress `from sweeper to engineer`. If workers were retrenched, they would have ownership of portable skills which could be utilised in other parts of the manufacturing industry and which would be accredited by employers through an industry recognised national certificate.[53]

The Australian system had evolved in a westernised industrial context where high levels of basic education prevailed. This was obviously not the case in South Africa where 66 per cent of black people had only attained Standard 3 (5 years of schooling) or less[54] and where low literacy rates were prevalent. This rendered it impossible for thousands of workers to enter an industrial training programme. In this context, the RDG evolved ideas around a system of Adult Basic Education (ABE) which would include training in literacy and numeracy and which would be integrated into Numsa's `vocational training system`.[55] In a similar manner to technical modules, there would be recognised standards for ABE courses, and in addition, ABE levels would link into the formal education system at specific points. The RDG, which included a number of women shopstewards, believed that the system was highly suited to the promotion of women workers who in general had the lowest education levels, were unskilled, and were in consequence the first to be retrenched and the last to be rehired. Finally, the RDG believed that employers should grant workers paid-time off to attend ABE and other training modules and that they should provide facilities, and trainers.

A training resolution incorporating these ideas was forwarded to Numsa's third National Congress in June 1991 where it was adopted. In the same year, in July, the union took the resolution to Cosatu Congress where it became national federation policy. The federation's new interest in the area of industrial training, led it to be immediately invited to send a delegate to the National Training Board (NTB), an advisory body on training matters to the Minister of Manpower. Bird was the Cosatu representative and this was her experience,

> The other union that was there, the white building workers, and we just fought. They had just been through an entire process developing something that they called a national training strategy and the day we arrived they said, `will everyone please sign the report` and we said, `Nope we are not going to sign it, we won't have anything to do with it.` We produced this major report deeply criticising this thing, all drawing off the policy stuff we'd developed.[56]

Simultaneously Cosatu established the Education and Training Participatory Research Project (PRP) where representatives from all affiliates convened to discuss and determine Cosatu training policy. Numsa's leadership in this forum was of pivotal importance and it was from this project that Cosatu drew representatives for eight working groups which were established under the auspices of the NTB to develop a new industrial training strategy for South Africa. Cosatu's PRP began to work closely with the ANC who attended the NTB working groups under the umbrella of Cosatu. Recalls Bird, "It turned out to be incredibly useful, because there was a real flow of information at that time between the unions and the ANC and the SACP."[57] It was in these working groups that Numsa was able to discuss, negotiate, and convince people of the logic of its training policy and it was here that the concept of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was born.[58]

It was thus that Numsa achieved its aim of engaging the state in its vision of a new inclusive training system for South Africa. It still however had to convince metal employers of the logic of its training vision and thereby persuade them of the necessity to commit substantial resources to this new system. It was in 1993 that the union introduced the concept of a three year bargaining programme, which had originated as an organisational tool, but which now began to take on new significance when policies such as those encapsulated in Numsa's training resolution contributed radical new bargaining content to the programme.

4. Linking parts of 3 year bargaining programme

Introduction

The formulation of a new training strategy had been deeply influenced by strategies current in the Australian trade union movement. The integration of this training strategy into a new vision for the union owed a good deal to what has been described as 'strategic unionism' as it was developed by the Australian trade unions.[59] 'Strategic unionism' was a response to the globalisation of capital and to the industrial restructuring that was contributing to massive job losses and declining standards in working conditions world wide. It focussed on the forging of an alternative industrial policy and appropriate workplace change to build workers' power in the face of strategies being employed by international capitalism. According to Numsa, employers were pursuing the route of 'lean production' in response to competitive pressures which involved cutting costs wherever possible including, most crucially, the cost of labour through the reduction of the labour force. In contrast, the union's goal was to transform the workplace and to introduce a democratic, non-racial order which was based on 'intelligent production'. According to a 1989 Australian Congress of Trade Unions in 1989 four features characterised strategic unionism: union involvement in wealth creation, not just redistribution;

proactive rather than reactive unionism; participation through bipartite and tripartite institutions; and a high level of union capacity and education and research.[60]

The most radical departure in this new vision was that of participation through bi-partite and tripartite institutions which entailed the building of a more co-operative relationship with both employees and the state. This, as has been outlined, was not entirely alien to the union's approach. It was already engaging in a number of joint government forums from local through to national and it had tentatively embarked on more open discussions around the industry with employers. Whilst the union had hard experience of the conflicting goals of capital and labour it was now beginning to acknowledge that areas of common interest existed between those who controlled industry and those who worked in it. In this it was pursuing a route which had no precedent in any developing country.[61] Co-determination which takes a number of forms, of which corporatism and concertation are the most well known, was primarily associated with trade unionism in developed nations. Corporatism seeks points of co-operation for mutual gain in bargaining and other areas of mutual interest and involves the state if it occurs at a national level. It assumes that the state cannot ignore a significant group who is making decisions about the economy and that a democratic government will be concerned to pursue policies such as full employment which are of mutual interest. As Crouch observes, "Unions engaged in this national level of activity have moved out of ordinary collective bargaining into the field of politics."[62] In some countries, such as Britain and Australia in the 1970s/1980s, such an orientation has taken the form of a Social Contract. Concertation on the other hand exists alongside, but separate, from the collective bargaining forum and attempts to exclude conflict by focussing on areas that are available for consultation rather than bargaining. Such matters are often more complex and require time to investigate and discuss and thus attitudes on both sides are more open and flexible. Such attitudes are reinforced by the knowledge that the concertation forum is not empowered to buttress demands with strike threats. If unresolvable issues are confronted these would be referred to the collective bargaining forum.[63] By 1993 Numsa, sometimes through Cosatu, had embarked on both these routes in various ways. It was participating in a number of national, regional, and local forums involving the state and/or business which involved both discussion and negotiation on policy formulation in what Baskin has described as 'bargained corporatism'.[64] As concerns concertation the union had established a number of sub-committees in its various national bargaining forums to discuss and investigate more complex issues that were available for resolution but which had previously delayed annual collective bargaining negotiations. Nevertheless the co-determination route was still a radical departure for the union.

Numsa was confronted with the dilemma of whether to remain within a conflictual paradigm where it had achieved a great deal or whether to pursue a new policy of promoting a shared understanding with employers wherever possible. In pursuing the consensual model the union was attempting

implementation in a low-trust situation where employers had a history of providing minimal information about their companies' performance. In general a conflict model of union/employer relations is known to exist in such an environment. A co-determinist model requires a high trust context and where this does not exist members are likely to view such an approach with deep suspicion and regard it as a betrayal. The other possibility also existed however that a union operating in low trust relations with employers may break this pattern through the adoption of a more co-determinist approach and thus gain better access to information about their industries.[65] Numsa however was operating against a history of sustained conflict between management and labour and the lesson workers had learnt to trust was that militant resistance had delivered substantial gains.

Numsa leadership while not discarding the strategic use of conflict, opted for the possibility of a more co-operative approach and in 1993 the union embraced an integrated programme of reform. At the shopfloor level, influenced by Japanese work systems in which the lines between management and workers were blurred, the union aimed to replace the racially segregated, authoritarian workplace with a democratic alternative where worker power would be enhanced through the development of skills and through the devolution of decision-making to the shopfloor. In Numsa's assessment its industries were over staffed at a supervisorial level, and remuneration was excessively skewed towards the top. It believed that where workplace restructuring enabled employers to cut costs, they should reward the whole workforce and not only a few managers and directors. It aimed to negotiate a flattening of company structures to allow for greater participation in the management of the shopfloor by workers. Ultimately it believed workers should supervise their own labour. It proposed that companies establish a work team in each department which consisted of skilled workers who supervised themselves and who were led by a team leader. Team leaders would be elected on a rotational basis to ensure broad development of leadership skills. National standards for training team leaders and team members would be set by the IETB (Industry Education Training Board) in each sector. The details of such a system, would however be further refined and specified at both enterprise and plant levels.[66] In this manner an unskilled dispensable workforce would become integral to production and thus protected from the danger of redundancy whilst management would benefit from the increased involvement in productive issues by its workforce.

Numsa's new approach would replace the annual round of adversarial bargaining with a three year plan whose objectives would be negotiated and jointly endorsed by management and the union. Militant mobilisation around wage demands would be replaced by a planned restructuring of the workplace, and wage demands would be linked to industry growth and job creation. The union's creation of strong centralised bargaining institutions (except in the motor sector) would allow for the negotiation of such a programme which, it believed, would be supported by employers in return for predictable

wage outcomes and stability in the workplace.

Programme of integrated demands

Alistair Smith understood Australian unionist, Chris Lloyd's, entry into the union in 1992 as an important moment for the union's new three year bargaining strategy,

> Chris Lloyd joined the union round August. And the basic elements of the strategy that we put into place around wage differentials, job creation, training and re-structuring and job security - his major contribution was integrating this into a framework. Up until then we had a set of fairly loosely connected demands. Chris's approach just brought all these strands together into an integrated structure.[67]

He did not however believe that Lloyd imposed an inappropriate set of Australian bargaining demands and systems on the union, an accusation that some levelled at a later date, "... the three year strategy was not Chris Lloyd's strategy. It was a strategy that derived from the natural development and struggle in the engineering industry. We actually set the pace, and the auto sector borrowed quite a lot from that."[68] Lloyd, too, saw Numsa's change in bargaining strategy as a response to an impasse that both the union and employers had reached. He recalls the employers' predicament, "The employers faced a period in 1993 when, not only were they facing the beginning of tariff reduction programmes, but the beginning of globalization, particularly illegal imports…and they were not really well prepared."[69] He believed that this pressure made them more receptive to the union's ideas,

> A lot of initial interest by employers to our bargaining approach came because they felt they could not go on with those industrial relations any longer. Secondly, they were facing globalization and the introduction of foreign competition and they had to do something urgent. So they had an initial interest, and we had an initial interest. Hence the three year strategy was agreed to in the 1993 Congress, and negotiated during the 1993 bargaining year.[70]

What 'strands' did Lloyd assist in bringing together 'into an integrated structure'? What was the restructuring agenda of the new three year bargaining programme that posited 'intelligent production'[71] which would offer membership a new role and new power on the factory floor?

The first strand which Bird had encountered in Australia was the 'skills based grading system.' At the time, in most of Numsa's industries, grading systems were linked to tasks and responsibilities and not skills, and it was thus difficult to assess how workers could move to a higher grade. This was compounded by the almost complete absence of training for black workers and the fact that low-skilled, low-grade workers earned low wages. Thus Numsa's first set of demands related to the development of training in the industry in order to establish career paths for black workers. These entailed the development of a new grading system the logic of which was the reduction in the number grades which in turn would be linked to the artisan rate of pay in an attempt to close the apartheid wage gap between unskilled and skilled workers. Payment would be based on skill qualification rather than a

rate for an actual job performed and thus, as workers enhanced their skill, so their wages would rise. The union demanded a reduction from the racially defined 13 grades to five grades up to artisan level, and the creation of two new grades above artisan level to allow these workers the opportunity to improve their skills and position further. The gap between wages in each grade, it demanded, should not be greater than 10 per cent whilst the percentage difference between the lowest grade, and the highest grade (two grades above artisan), should be no more than 60 per cent. The union was aware that raising the wages of low paid workers would involve employers in considerable costs which might prevent them from seriously considering the union's demands. In order to circumvent a deadlock on this demand, it proposed that for three years workers in the bottom grades should receive higher wage increases than workers at the top. It believed that in this manner it would reach its goal of a differential in wages between the top and the bottom of 60 per cent. The overall increase in the wage bill to employers amounted to a cost of living increase, plus a 5 per cent improvement factor. At the time, there were 13 grades up to artisan level in engineering, and 8 grades up to artisan in motor. The union proposed to reduce this to 5 grades by merging all grades into a 'broad band' of skills. This would open the way for flexibility and team work based on multi-skilling and would allow for a more productive, and hence competitive, environment as well as provide workers with greater job satisfaction. The benefits to employers would be predictable wage increases and thus an end to national industrial action around the issue of wage increases. The union would agree in advance to a wage increase over a period of three years of 15 per cent ie an average increase in real wages of 5 per cent a year.[72]

In the area of skills improvement and training the union demanded one Industry Education and Training Board (IETB) in each sector. IETBs would assess the skills needed for each of the new pay levels, or grades, which would be described through skills-based definitions. Following this 'broad banding' exercise, the IETB would research what mix of skills workers required at each level. In this it would utilise such guidelines as what work had to be performed, and when, whether the work was routine and repetitive or if some level of decision-making was required, if workers were supervised, or if they supervised others, and whether the completed task required checking by a more senior worker. Numsa demanded the completion of these skill-based definitions by 1994, and that the IETBs should develop courses which would provide the framework for a career path within the industry by 1995. Furthermore, it demanded that all companies conduct a skills assessment based on agreed broad banded skills to establish each worker's existent skills in order to implement the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) principle. After such an assessment, workers would be remunerated for all skills utilised on the job providing that those who were already in a certain grade could not be downgraded if they did not posses all the skills in the newly defined grade. Instead they should receive training in all tasks required for a grade, whilst workers possessing an excess of skills for a grade, should be upgraded.[73]

In addition, the bargaining programme contained demands which reflected Numsa's on-going concerns with negotiating adequate benefits and conditions of work. It demanded a gradual reduction in hours of work over a three year period. The union demanded that working time be reduced to 1 920 hours per year without loss of pay - a repetition of the earlier demand for a 40 hour week. The current situation in the union was that workers in engineering performed a 44 hour week, while in auto and tyre a 40 hour week had been achieved except for tyre industry workers at Sales Offices who worked a 50 hour week, and in the motor industry workers laboured a 45 hour week.[74] The union also demanded that all pension and provident funds at plant or national level be amalgamated and fall under the Industrial Council or Bargaining Forum in that sector. The logic behind this demand was that the combining of contributions would result in large amounts of money which would generate better rates of interest and hence the granting of improved benefits. The Industry Retirement Fund in each sector would then be able to provide a death benefit equal to five times the worker's annual salary, and disability income benefits of not less than 60 per cent of the worker`s earnings. Furthermore the union demanded that medical aid and other medical schemes which provided for white or coloured staff alone, be replaced with common industry wide schemes which provided adequate benefits. The union believed the most appropriate vehicle for dealing with employees ill-health needs was the sick benefit scheme which already existed in engineering but should be implemented in its other sectors. It also demanded six months paid maternity leave across all its sectors which would incorporate 45 per cent of the workers' wage from the UIF.[75]

In the area of worker rights it demanded such facilities as negotiation and report-back rights and union amenities at the workplace, paid leave for shopstewards to attend negotiations, including training in preparation for negotiations, and four hours paid leave every three months to allow shopstewards to report-back on industry restructuring issues. Furthermore it demanded that any negotiations on the restructuring of its industries should take place in the context of both securing existing jobs and creating new ones.[76]

Finally, the union put forward proposals on levels of bargaining and outlined specific issues that should be negotiated at plant or industry levels. Its proposals on levels of bargaining emerged from extensive discussion. Numsa had embraced Cosatu's policy of forming centralised bargaining structures wherever possible and in the previous five years had fought hard to create such structures. In the early 1990s however the union began to question the advisability of bargaining through centralised structures alone. This was partly due to the fact that in practice Numsa had not been able to realise its centralised bargaining strategy despite national negotiating structures in all its sectors. Traditionally the union, particularly in motor components and larger engineering plants, had bargained at two levels and this

situation had persisted. The union now questioned whether a purely centralised system was advisable. Its research into bargaining arrangements elsewhere, particularly in Europe and Australia, revealed a compromise between centralised and decentralised wage bargaining. Here the broad principle was to set minimum 'floors' for wages, conditions and skills across an industry or industrial sector, as in Germany, or across the entire economy as in Australia where wage solidarity was strong. It learnt too that in the 1980s during the social contract period in Australia a serious weakening of the grassroots union movement strength had resulted because of the emphasis on national corporatist negotiations. The advantage in maintaining a two-tiered system was that it allowed shopstewards and workers to continue to engage in plant struggles for better conditions. The national minimum then operated as the benchmark from which workers in wealthier companies could bargain on specific issues. At centralised level, wages and conditions would be negotiated at the lowest common denominator thus enabling all enterprises to implement the agreement. Another advantage in a two tiered system, Numsa believed, was that it offered a solution to on-going disagreements around regional wages and exemptions. The system allowed for variations between plants without the necessity to exempt whole regions. Thus a plant in the Eastern Cape which manufactured agricultural fabrications (gates and fences) could pay the national minimum whilst negotiations in an adjacent export oriented auto components plant could result in wages above the minimum rate. New industry minimums would be based on engineering rather than tyre or auto rates and would include wages, hours of work and so on. Ultimately the union could negotiate in one employer forum across the metal industry on national increases and all other negotiations could take place at plant level.[77]

Thus the union proposed that it should first negotiate broad frameworks at industry level, and thereafter shopstewards should negotiate the details at plant level. At this point negotiations would still take place within different sectors and not across the entire metal industry, although this was the union's ultimate aim. Changes to work organisation and productivity awards, for example, should be negotiated at plant level whilst wages, basic conditions and benefits across the industry, industrial policy and industrial restructuring, modernisation measures, job security and job creation would be negotiated in centralised forums. The union established various deadlines for the negotiation and implementation of this `package` at industry level with the proviso that all aspects of the programme should be in place by the end of 1996.

The package of demands was the most ambitious programme ever assembled by the union and represented a significant strategic shift in both the style and content of its bargaining goals. It had formulated a coherent and practical vision of where the industry should be going and outlined the role of labour in this vision. This was a long way from the spontaneous action that the union had endorsed in the 1980s as a strategy to exert sustained pressure on recalcitrant managements. Now, for the first

time, it was creating the conditions for a stability and predictability in labour relations which it believed would strengthen and support the re-building of South Africa's embattled manufacturing sector. The new strategy offered a real alternative in a context where employers had few answers or plans for the future of the industry. As an organisational tool, the bargaining programme attempted to address the union's deepening capacity and delivery problems by creating more time to both negotiate and implement changes in the industry within a defined set of goals.

There were however some unionists who had doubts about whether such an ambitious programme addressed the resources and delivery problem or whether it had merely created a more complicated set of goals in the context of an overloaded union, top heavy with structures. In addition there were concerns expressed that many rank-and-file members and organisers did not fully understand the ideas in the bargaining programme or their implications despite discussions and debate in the CEC, NEC, in locals, and at regional congresses. The union attempted to address the problem by urging shopstewards to place a restructuring item on every workplace general meeting agenda, but there were already complaints that workplace meetings were not as regular as they had used to be and tended only to be convened when wages were being negotiated. There were also doubts expressed about the ability of the union to realise these goals in equal measure across all its sectors within a three year period especially in the union's most underdeveloped motor sector.

5. Conclusion

The concurrence of thinking in both its sectors led the union to evolve a complex and integrated strategy of demands. The ideas behind these demands had originated in the training RDG established in 1989. Subsequent discussions, and the borrowing of ideas from the Australian labour sector, had resulted in a nexus of training, grading into a broad band of skills, and wages linked to an agreed increase over a three year period. This integrated package of demands was linked to a plan to restructure Numsa's industries in co-determinist discussion with employers and the government in order to secure a stable and growing macro economic framework and to secure existing jobs and to create new ones.

The new programme was embraced enthusiastically by sectors of Numsa's leadership and plans to disseminate the new bargaining programme were rapidly put into place. Amongst some of the leadership however there were doubts about Numsa's ability to deliver this ambitious plan across all its sectors. In particular doubts arose around the union's ability to deliver this sophisticated programme in its underdeveloped motor sector. It was these doubts, coupled with the energy and focus that a new bargaining approach brought, that led the union to re-focus it attention in 1993 on its most forgotten

and neglected motor sector. The following chapter will explore how this sector was revitalised.

ENDNOTES

[1] *Numsa Info* No 6 1993, personal copy.
[2] Discussion on Collective Bargaining in Numsa Kally Forrest, Bobbie Marie, Karl Von Holdt, Jenny Grice, 1996.
[3] Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[4] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[5] *South African Labour Bulletin* "The future of wage bargaining: interview with Bernie Fanaroff".
[6] Moll, T "Output and productivity trends in South Africa: Apartheid and economic growth" PhD, University of Cambridge, 1990.
[7] Interview Chris Lloyd, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[10] Sussex University's Moss Ngoasheng's paper and the Sociology of Work's report to Numsa in 1990 are examples of such input. "Input No 2: presentation to Numsa workshop: Restructuring of work in the metal industry - implications for collective bargaining. International restructuring of work: the JIT labour process -" University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11.1; "SWOP Report for Numsa: "The restructuring of Work: Changes in the Labour Process and the Labour Market" Sociology of Work Programme June 1990 University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B67.
[11] *Work in Progress* "One Union, one industry" Robyn Rafel No 65 Apr 1990.
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[16] *South African Labour Bulletin* "The future of wage bargaining: interview with Bernie Fanaroff".
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[19] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[22] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11 "Notes of employers contribution to Collective Bargaining Workshop Jhb 13 -15 November 1990"; *Numsa Bulletin* "Restructuring the economy" April 1991; "Summary of Collective Bargaining RDG meeting held on 14 February 1991: Annexure "B" Seifsa presentation on the future of the metal industry with particular reference to growth and

employment possibilities" University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11.
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[24] *South African Labour Bulletin* "Towards transforming SA industry".
[25] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11, "Notes of employers contribution to Collective Bargaining Workshop Jhb 13 -15 November 1990"
[26] Interview Chris Lloyd, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[27] Ibid.
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[29] *South African Labour Bulletin* "The future of wage bargaining: interview with Bernie Fanaroff".
[30] *South African Labour Bulletin* "Industrial Strategy for South Africa: recommendations of the ISP" Vol 8 No 1 1994.
[31] Interview Chris Lloyd, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[32] *South African Labour Bulletin* "The future of wage bargaining: interview with Bernie Fanaroff".
[33] Ibid.
[34] *Numsa Info* "Industrial Restructuring Policy Issues No 6 1993, personal copy.
[35] *Business Day* "Electrification forum shows it is switched on" Matthew Curtin 24/11/1993.
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[38] Ibid.
[39] This refers to Gramsci and the group of activist, the most prominent being Palmiro Togliatti, who produced the *L'Ordine Nuovo*.
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[46] "Report to Numsa NCC on the Progress and Workings of the Job Training Research Group" 8/9 April 1989, personal copy.
[47] Interview Adrienne Bird with Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[48] Ibid.
[49] *Numsa News* "National Bargaining Conference" February 1990, personal copy.
[50] *Numsa Bulletin* "Numsa 91 Education - Research" April 1991, personal copy.

[51] Interview Adrienne Bird by Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[52] *The Shopsteward* "Linking skills and wages" Sam Morotoba Vol 2.5 Oct/Nov 1993, personal copy.
[53] Numsa Education and Research Occasional Publication Number 1 February 1990; *Numsa Vocational Training Project* March 1991, personal copy.
[54] *Numsa Vocational Training Project* March 1991.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Interview Adrienne Bird by Matthew Ginsberg in March 1997.
[57] Ibid.
[58] By 1994 Bird had stopped working in the union. She had moved deeper into education and training policy work. She worked for the Centre for Education Policy Development, and headed a group that investigated policy around the establishment of SAQA (SA qualification authority). She was also spent time at the NTB working on future legislation in the area of education and training. Later she joined the Metal Engineering Industry Education Training Board. Here she worked on a project concerning career paths for metal workers, and on restructuring the training board in accordance with the policy work that Numsa had initiated.
[59] Joffe, A, J Maller, and E Webster (1993): "South Africa's Industrialisation: The Challenge Facing Labour" Paper delivered at Symposium on "Work Class and Culture" University of the Witwatersrand.
[60] ACTU/TDC Mission, 1989.
[61] Baskin: J (2000): "Labour in South Africa's transition to democracy: Concertation in a Third World Setting" in Adler, Glenn and Eddie Webster, eds (2000): *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
[62] Colin Crouch (1982:208/9) "Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action" Fontana , Great Britain.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Baskin, J "The Trend Towards Bargained Corporatism " (1993) *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No3/4. By 1993 Numsa was involved in a range of bi-partite and tri-partite forums, often via Cosatu, such as the NEF, NMC, NTB, National Housing Forum, National Electricity Forum, National Education & Training Forum, National Local Government Forum, National Consultative Forum on Drought, Science and Technology Initiative, Auto Industry Restructuring Forum, and various Peace Forums (*Cosatu Negotiations Bulletin* No 1 August 1993).
[65] Colin Crouch (1982) "Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action".
[66] *Numsa News* "Numsa's joint bargaining demands" Number 1 June 1993, personal copy.
[67] Interview Alistair Smith, November 1996.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Interview Chris Lloyd, November 1996.
[70] Ibid.
[71] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555, "Document from National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: National Collective Bargaining: 3 Year Strategy Workshop 10/11 July 1993". Numsa adopted this term from usage by the German labour movement.
[72] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555*Numsa News* "Numsa's joint bargaining demands" Number 1 June 1993; *Numsa Info* No 6, 1993; *Living Wage Campaign: The new bargaining strategy 1993- 1996*; *Numsa Organiser and shop steward handbook "Guidelines for negotiating the Numsa three year strategy* University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/ B11.
[73] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555, *Numsa News* "Numsa's joint bargaining demands" Number 1 June 1993; *Numsa Info* No 6, 1993; *Living Wage Campaign: The new bargaining strategy 1993- 1996*;"*Guidelines for negotiating the Numsa three year strategy* University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11.

[74] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11.3 , "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: Collective Bargaining: Special Update to the Central Committee"; *Living Wage Campaign: The new bargaining strategy 1993- 1996* University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555; *Numsa News* "Demands around working conditions, benefits and worker rights" Number 1 June 1993.
[75] Ibid.
[76] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555, *Wage Campaign: The new bargaining strategy 1993-1996*; *Numsa News* "Demands around working conditions, benefits and worker rights" Number 1 June 1993; "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: Collective Bargaining: Special Update to the Central Committee" University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555 B11.3.
[77] Ibid.

Chapter 9
Restructuring the Motor Sector, 1988 - 1995

1. Introduction

"The union had neglected that sector effectively. The big sectors of political plants in engineering and auto they were pushing, they were making demands. The motor workers were an add on. There was not any resources allocated to them. There was not a big focus on them."[1] It was in this manner that Tony Ehrenreich a former national motor co-ordinator, remembers the motor sector before 1990. Why was this the case? Why had the union failed to build power in this sector as it had in its other industries, despite the fact that it incorporated at least a quarter of the union's membership (50 000 members) and possessed a National Industrial Council (National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry)?

This section explores how Numsa belatedly rebuilt the Nicmi and revitalised the union's presence in the industry. It demonstrates the union's skill in building power in the face of strong employer opposition and in utilising corrupt, racist institutions as a shell through which to apply its power. It also illustrates the union's ability effectively to organise at the shopfloor through the revisiting of the Mawu and Naawu traditions which had located workers at the centre of their organising efforts. The focussed commitment and tradition of hard work and careful strategising is also in evidence. It demonstrates too that without a clear strategy, good leadership, and careful attention to organisational detail, significant membership and the existence of a national bargaining institution counted for little.

In December 1993 the motor industry hired 179 000 employees in 17 691 companies, most of them very small, employing on average 10 workers.[2] Historically Micwu had its strongest membership in the Natal and Western Cape regions largely because it organised coloured and Indian artisan and clerical workers. Coloured workers predominated in the Western Cape owing to the government's coloured preferential policy. Few African workers were to be found in the Western Cape except in the heaviest and most unskilled jobs. Demographically South Africa's Indian population was located predominantly in Natal, hence Micwu's strength in this region where it recruited many Indian clerical workers. Numsa inherited this regional bias together with a growing number of African unskilled garage workers, particularly in the Transvaal, who fell outside closed shop arrangements.

The Nicmi covered workers of all races (although very few Africans were artisans) and divided them for negotiating purposes into five sectors or `chapters`. These embraced Chapter 1 petrol station and

repair shop workers, panel beaters, workers in spares outlets, Chapter 2 workers in vehicle body building shops constructing large tankers, trailers, trucks and buses, Chapter 3 consisting of motor component workers in manufacturing firms, Chapter 4 where workers laboured in automotive engineering shops overhauling engines, and finally the reconditioning establishments of Chapter 5 where workers repaired small motor parts such as brake shoes, clutches, starters, alternators and pressure plates. Wages and working conditions for these workers were reflected in Division A of the Main Agreement whilst Division B covered office, stores and clerical workers working in companies in the above Chapters.

Many of the component manufacturers, such as Bosal, SKF, Smiths Industries, Dorbyl, Bosch, Feldtex, Armstrong Hydraulics, and Hella, operated large plants and were the most accessible to organisation but were not however typical of the industry. The retailers, such as the McCarthy Group, Saficon, Malbak, Imperial, Barlow Motor Holdings, and Combined Motor Holdings, were the most powerful sector in the industry and employed the largest number of workers - about 120 000.

Prior to 1987, Micwu had organised the artisan and clerical levels across all Nicmi chapters in many companies that were affiliated to the South African Motor Industry Employers' Association (Samiea) which was party to a closed shop agreement. By 1987 however Samiea only represented 45 per cent of employers in the industry.[3] On merger with Numsa this membership was automatically transferred to the new union under the closed shop agreement. Thus Numsa was saved the laborious task of recruiting these members which also in part accounted for its general neglect of this category of worker. A large number of Numsa's membership however fell outside of the closed shop. About 50 component manufacturers were not party to a closed shop, nor were the vast majority of Numsa's mainly African semi and unskilled members such as garage attendants. These unskilled petrol pump attendants were its most vulnerable members. As Ekki Esau, a former Micwu organiser and later Regional Secretary Southern Natal Numsa recalled, "Any trouble from them and the employer threatened them with self service pumps. It was difficult to get garage workers together to take action because they were scattered all over the place."[4]

The Nicmi had existed since the 1960s and was a strong well administered industrial council. High subscriptions from its well remunerated artisan base had allowed it to establish good administration and industry benefits such as medical-aid schemes and pension funds which encouraged many workers to stay in the industry to ensure access to these benefits. Conditions negotiated at national level applied across the industry. Thus an employer in an open shop could not undercut wages negotiated by the Council. In general, Nicmi inspectors were vigilant in monitoring employers to ensure that they paid the agreed rates and companies were obliged to open their books to agents on request. According to

Esau however, for the few coloured, Indian and African artisans and clerical workers different standards applied, and the predominantly white Afrikaner inspectors often ignored a situation where black workers were not remunerated at the agreed rate.[5]

Prior to Micwu's inclusion in Numsa, three unions party to the Nicmi, namely Micwu, the Mieu (Motor Industry Employees Union) negotiating for white artisans and Misa (Motor Industry Staff Association) representing white clerical staff, came together in the National Liaison Committee (NLC) to co-ordinate strategies and negotiate demands. In December 1982 employer organisations represented about 56 percent of all employers party to the council and these employers in turn represented 49 percent of all workers covered by the council. Micwu represented a growing number of low-paid workers who were remunerated at the minimum rates and relied on the Nicmi to lay down acceptable basic conditions. The racially exclusive unions collectively only represented about 33 per cent of workers covered by the council. Their low representivity in 1982 reflected their weak position relative to employers who were more organised and easily concluded agreements with white unions on conditions of employment whilst a substantial number of African workers had an agreement imposed on them.[6] The other two unions represented skilled white workers who earned far in excess of the minimum rates and their concern was chiefly to improve Nicmi's pension and medical pay-outs and other benefits. Frequently employers offered increases to benefit funds without offering adequate increases on the minimum wage. In the 1980s as Micwu's semi- and unskilled membership grew, the union came into frequent conflict with the other unions on the Nicmi and by the time of merger with Numsa it had withdrawn from the NLC and was negotiating its own demands on the Council.[7] This independence was also assisted by its withdrawal from Tucsa in 1984.

2. Numsa's weakest sector

Numsa adopted Micwu's centralised bargaining approach because it was the most effective way of dealing with an industry where the national average was 16 workers per company, and with the rural areas, where 2 000 workers were employed, establishments employed on average 5 workers.[8] Employers in Samiea, however, did not enthusiastically embrace their new bargaining partner. They feared Numsa's reputation as a militant, well-organised union and they immediately attempted to defuse the potential power that the union could harness through centralised bargaining. Their tactic was to reduce the Council to a `talk shop` where they could discuss matters of interest, but not negotiate.[9]

In their endeavours, employers were assisted by the white unions on the Nicmi. In similar manner to the engineering and auto sectors a few years previously, the union was confronted with the power of racist white unions who had forged an alliance with Samiea employers. Esau recalls the powerful grip

that these unions held over employers, “We could achieve very little on the Industrial Council because we were obstructed by the white unions... The council was so wrapped up in the white unions. Given the stubbornness of employers in the industry, and their attitude to Numsa and African workers, that they were barbarians, it has never been easy to organise this industry.”[10] A generation of younger more militant workers was however emerging in the industry and in the union who were not steeped in the bureaucratic closed-shop Tucsa style of unionism in which Esau had been schooled. One of the younger leaders to emerge was Tony Ehrenreich who had a history of student activism and who was one of the powerful shopstewards that drove a rare strike at McCarthys in the retail industry in 1988.

The dispute centred on the signing of a recognition agreement where shopstewards would be recognised for the purpose of bargaining, although other grievances were also raised. Ehrenreich and other shopstewards canvassed membership in the company’s Western Cape branches extensively before embarking on the strike. The company owned the Mercedes Benz second-hand car bar operation, and the Mazda and Toyota retail outlets. Toyota had seven plants in the Western Cape, Mercedes five and Mazda two. Initially the strike broke out in one division of the company but soon workers in all of the branches, in all divisions, were on strike. Shopstewards from different plants would congregate each night to strategise and review the day’s action. The action was unusual. It involved strikers occupying the head office over a period of three days. Each day strikers clocked in at their workplaces and shopstewards ensured that they returned to reoccupy head office. Some branches were weaker than others, and shopstewards sent strikers over to these plants to gather workers a bring them across. Head office doors were swiftly opened as it was Numsa members who routinely opened the premises. Mainly coloured workers were involved in the action, but in an unusual event a number of white workers supported the strike. However, Ehrenreich wryly observed, “I think we shouted `Viva!` a bit too much and they went back.”[11]

By the second day, when 80 per cent of workers were participating in the action, management was forced to shut down all its operations. After three days it indicated a willingness to settle. Ehrenreich commented, “We concluded an agreement with them which was historic.”[12] The company signed a procedural agreement giving Numsa the right to shopstewards meetings across divisions, the right to monthly general meetings at plants, and an agreement to bargain on substantive issues, such as wages (in a later 1990 strike of 400 members at all plants in the Western Cape, McCarthy workers won the right to regional bargaining on divisional lines). Two months later Ehrenreich was employed as a Numsa organiser. Assisted by McCarthy shopstewards, he used the success of the strike the strike to approach other divisions in the company to extend the agreement across the country. Ehrenreich believed it was a significant strike because it influenced the way other motor companies dealt with the union, “That was a wake up call for the industry in the Western Cape because... after that companies

wanted a structured relationship with us. Big companies, when we came to them with our draft agreement, would have copies already, because they had a liaison committee between the big retailers, so they had discussed it, and decided to work with us."[13]

In November 1990 Numsa declared a dispute for the first time in Nicmi negotiations after six months of negotiating. Negotiations had opened in March 1990. Mieu and Misa had already accepted the employer offer even though their combined membership was 20 000 compared to Numsa's 50 000. Employers had agreed to an increased meal allowance for overtime, a no pay, no discipline policy for absence on June 16 and March 21, pap smears on request in writing, and an increase in the annual bonus from one to two weeks but Numsa's wage demand remained unmet and employers were refusing to negotiate further. The union was demanding a R1 an hour minimum increase on the lower grades backdated to 1 September 1990 when the agreement expired, and the uniform application of the rate for the job across the country. Western Cape Numsa motor members presented Samiea with a memorandum threatening protest action. It recorded workers' dissatisfaction with employers' delaying tactics, particularly around wages, which had resulted in 6 months of negotiations, and urged an immediate resolution of talks.[14] Their plea was ignored and negotiations only recommenced the following year. The dispute was only resolved in February 1991 amidst members' complaints that Numsa organisers neglected motor in favour of other union sectors. The union won a 15 per cent increase on the, by then, gazetted minimum rates, which although not backdated, met inflation and was a small victory.[15] Annual inflation at this point was running at 14.8 per cent.[16] Numsa remained concerned however, at the employers' reluctance to bargain on the Nicmi which did not bode well for the next round of negotiations which was due to begin in March 1991. Further problems soon arose. The Minister of Manpower delayed the publishing of the new agreement in the Government Gazette which meant the new minima did not come into law and employers ignored it. In July 1991 shopstewards staged a sit-in at the offices of the Department of Manpower in Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town to protest the delay. This resulted in a meeting between Numsa, the Department of Manpower and a delegation from the Industrial Council. The agreement was subsequently published on 16 August 1991 just as it was due to expire.[17] Numsa was already negotiating a new agreement which it wanted concluded by September 1. Nevertheless it was important to gazette these minima to provide the union with a benchmark for the 1991/1992 negotiations.

Meanwhile the Nicmi 1991 round of negotiations had opened in May 1991 in Durban. Numsa presented the demand for a minimum rate of pay of R 4, 50 an hour. Employer's deep reluctance to consider the issue of wages repeated itself. They proposed that wages not be increased until the end of August 1992. The union declared a dispute in August 1991and members embarked on lunchtime demonstrations in numerous workplaces across the country. Demonstration stoppages ranging from 2

to 4 hours occurred in workplaces in Northern Transvaal, Northern Cape, and Western Cape. Protest marches also took place in Pretoria, East London, Burgersdorp, Dordrecht and Port Elizabeth.[18] Finally the union embarked on balloting membership for strike action. The exercise demonstrated Numsa's neglect of this sector. The union recognised that many organisers were profoundly ignorant of the industry and that strike balloting was chaotic as organisers had little idea of where workplaces were situated. In all they needed to ballot 8 719 party establishments and 4 - 5 000 non party establishments if they wanted to bring out the whole of the industry.[19]

In terms of Nicmi's constitution after three attempts at resolving a dispute the parties were obliged to go to mediation. All attempts failed. Thus mediation was agreed upon under the auspices of Imssa (Independent Mediation Services of South Africa).[20] Employers continued to drag their heels and the dispute was only resolved through mediation in February 1992, the following year. Although the union was negotiating from a position of weakness, mediation enabled it to push the employer offer from nothing to a 10 per cent increase on the minimum for production workers. This was however well below inflation which was running at 16 per cent.[21]

The following year, 1992, the union attempted to negotiate wages for the 1992/93 period. Again it was confronted with similar foot dragging. Employers offered increases ranging between 0 - 4,9 percent in various grades despite the fact that in an unusual event the Mieu had also declared a dispute on wages.[22] The previous wage agreement was due to expire in August 1992. By July 1993 no settlement had been reached. In a request for legal opinion, Numsa noted that Samiea 'failed or refused to submit proposals or counter proposals, rejected all Numsa demands without counterproposals and was evasive."[23] Numsa compromised and dropped many demands. The union by this time should have begun negotiations for the 1993/4 Nicmi agreement. Its suspicion that the employers were attempting to collapse the Nicmi was growing fast. These suspicions were confirmed when a secret Samiea document prepared by JH Herdman, President of Samiea, dated March 3, 1993 was leaked. Here Herdman observed,

> If we are expected to negotiate with trade Unions we must put forward our demands and persevere with talks until such time as they collapse. Meanwhile the Agreement will lapse totally on August 31 and new arrangements must be made for the collection of fund monies, etc. otherwise it will not be possible for us to withdraw from the Council until such time as negotiations have finally ceased. If we are to stand firm and not give in as the Board has insisted then there will be months of confusion, all to no avail... It would be in the best interests of our members if we were to withdraw from the Council with effect from the end of August 1993 when the present Agreement expires.[24]

The document spoke of the need to `restrain` Numsa and was riddled with hypocrisy and double standards. Samiea employers had for years supported the Nicmi as the most suitable form of bargaining for employers. Now Herdman believed that the Nicmi was too 'complicated' and that

Numsa was 'aggressive' in protecting its members' rights through centralised bargaining and was using the Nicmi as a means of ensuring that agreements were "forced upon all employers". He complained that Samiea did not properly reflect the interests of smaller business despite years of the Association representing this constituency in negotiations. He denounced the Industrial Council closed shop system as being undemocratic and against the 'human rights' of employees not to join unions. Previously when the closed shop had applied to white workers employers had never raised objections. When Numsa sought to represent the interests of black workers and expand the democratic functioning and representivity of Nicmi, Herdman as a representative of racist employers in the industry, turned on the system that had served their purposes for so long.[25]

Samiea employers aimed to obstruct and prolong negotiations through such subterfuges as a demand that the agreement on wages cover urban areas alone on the grounds that small town employers could not afford to pay high wages. Samiea was fully aware that the union would not accept this. It also refused to finalise wage negotiations unless the union agreed to extend trading hours to include Saturdays. Again it knew that the union would not agree to Saturdays being converted into a normal working day which would extend working hours over a 45 hour week. Equally obdurate it refused to revisit its wage offer.[26] Finally it insisted that no wage increases could be granted unless the union agreed on the dismantling of the closed shop system. The prospect of the Nicmi collapsing alarmed Numsa. Many workers would lose benefits such as medical, retirement and holiday because small employers would not be able to sustain the infrastructure to administer them. Three agreements were customarily negotiated at Nicmi, namely the annual wage agreement, an agreement dealing with substantive conditions of employment such as leave and benefits, and an administrative agreement concerned with the running of the Council which was due to expire on 31 August 1993. The latter's expiry would in effect lead to the Council's collapse. Employers denied that benefit funds would collapse if the Council collapsed. The General Manager of the Motor Industries Fund Administrators responded that should the Council cease to exist, it would be impossible to administer the funds not least since it would be unable to send assessments to employers because it would have no record of employers and employees in the industry.[27]

The closure of the Council would also signal the end of a national minimum wage in the industry condemning weak, unorganised workers to poverty incomes. Numsa organised about 50 000 workers but the Nicmi Main Agreement covered about 170 000 workers in all.[28] In addition the union would have no recourse to a Main Agreement where conditions of employment such as working hours, and overtime rates where laid out. Percy Thomas, Numsa's National Motor Organiser, expressed the fear that, "Most of our members will not suffer any change in present employment conditions. It is the new employees that will have vastly inferior working conditions forced upon them."[29] The union also

feared the loss of an industry facilitator where the Nicmi for example, had assisted in the establishment of a Training Board and co-ordinated the collaboration of 11 different employer bodies over the issue.

Between 1990 -1993 numerous negotiations took place and at least 30 meetings that cost the Industrial Council over a million rand whilst employers deliberately delayed coming to a settlement.[30] When the wage agreement expired in August 1992 workers received no increase despite galloping inflation. General workers' 1993 wages, for example, had declined to 78 per cent of the buying power that their 1990 wages had secured.[31] Membership began to express anger at Numsa's inability to deliver. In desperation, members, sometimes with the assistance of the union, opened plant level negotiations in a number of establishments. In 1990 the Central Committee (CC) of Numsa identified motor members as being the most poorly organised sector in the union which urgently needed focussed attention.[32] A report in *Numsa Bulletin* in 1991 observed, "Plants are small and all over the place. Organising these workers was not taken seriously last year. This meant that shop stewards hardly ever attended general meetings or shop stewards councils and most of them didn't know what was going on in the union. The organising section will make sure that the CC's plans are carried out to solve these problems."[33] Numsa's Organising and Collective Bargaining (OCB) department was now mandated to conduct a recruitment and organising campaign in this sector. After the election of shopstewards in each workplace, they would come together to elect a street committee. This committee would in turn elect an area committee which would attend meetings of the local shop steward council. In rural areas shopstewards were mandated to form a town committee, and from this elect an area committee. Ehrenreich however believed the union had not sufficiently applied its mind to an education and campaign strategy so that the strategy was doomed,

> There were intensive campaigns to pressurise the bosses but I do not think we got our ducks in a row properly by developing organisational capacity around concrete issues before challenging employers. People relied on workers responding emotionally, and there was no real communication with the workers about what the issues were, and what the employers` attitude was. We had to ballot for all of those things during that period. Ballot results were a dismal failure.[34]

After the declaration of a dispute and a subsequent ballot in 1993, for example, less than 30 per cent of workers in the industry voted to take strike action.[35] This reinforced employers' obstinacy as it revealed that Numsa was too weak to take meaningful action. By 1993 the motor sector was in a poor state and former Micwu members complained that they should have remained in the less militant and less powerful Micwu. Structures were weak, many workers had little understanding of the issues they confronted, communication and servicing of membership was poor, and employers sensed the lack of union motivation or strategy.

Why was it so difficult to build power in this sector? In former days Mawu and Naawu had confronted

equally obstructive employers and had engaged the intellects and commitment of equally unskilled workers to win substantial gains. Esau attributed the failure in part to the merger into a large multi-faceted union. He believed that whilst "employers sat up and took notice" of such a body "maybe we could have achieved more for motor workers in a single focus union... Maybe we could have gone much further if there had been a sole focus on this industry."[36] This however did not explain later developments in the sector and in many ways reflected former Micwu organisers' inability to adapt to a different kind of union. Ehrenreich was also critical of former Naawu organiser, Les Kettledas' approach to bargaining in the sector, "I mean we had very good negotiators like Les Kettledas who was responsible for that sector. He was very confident and was good negotiating, but I think that the union hadn't developed the base to back up their demands. The result was negotiators were frustrated and it was written off as a sector that wasn't going to work."[37] Kettledas came from a tradition of organising more skilled workers in large plants where membership was easy to mobilise. It was perhaps the ex-Mawu organisers who emerged from the engineering sector who could have adopted the most appropriate strategy for the organisation of these semi- and unskilled workers because of their experience in organising numerous, small establishments where unskilled migrant workers laboured. Where, however, ex-Mawu organisers were required to organise motor workers in Numsa, they were often constrained by the Micwu bureaucratic tradition of negotiating through the Industrial Council and legalistically applying the Main Agreement. Their confidence in dealing with the sector was further eroded by a lack of understanding of how the Main Agreement operated. Nikita Vazi, an ex-Mawu Natal organiser, recounted his experience of organising in the motor sector,

> We never knew how to use the industrial council - especially motor industrial council - there were two organisers who knew about operations of motor sector. But they were fairly old - Mbonambi was killed during that violence. We were never workshopped on that Main Agreement... we didn't know the minimums in the industry, we would go and declare a dispute, and then Ekki [Esau] would call you but because of the Main Agreement it says this, you can't do this. But mostly it was embarrassing, information was centred around the three ex-Micwu people. When I came to the [Western] Cape comrades knew exactly what was in the industry, and a broad layer of leadership, shopstewards and organisers knew the Agreement. Only when I came here, it was then that I started to know these things.[38]

Esau attributed the failure to mobilise the industry to a general lack of interest on the part of former auto and engineering organisers,

> The organisers came from engineering and auto backgrounds so we had to educate guys to deal with motor. Very few people, besides our organisers who knew the industry, really bothered with getting to know the motor industry. It was too much work. So our members felt they were neglected. Organisers were also not interested in the four or five members over there when engineering offered them big factories to service.[39]

Part of the difficulties faced by the new organisers was that the sector embraced a wide range of skills and education levels from highly skilled artisans, to semi-skilled machine operators, through to

unskilled garage attendants. Mawu organisers felt uncomfortable with the Micwu style of organising and with organising skilled, well-educated artisans when they themselves often had less education and training. They were used to the language, style, and demands of semi- and unskilled workers in the engineering industry and they did not know how to approach these journeymen who were preoccupied with improvements to their benefits. In consequence they simply avoided recruiting and organising such workers. Micwu organisers, on the other hand, were familiar with the nature of these workers' needs but were less comfortable with Naawu and Mawu's style of organising through structures that promoted worker control which was required in the organisation of less skilled and less educated workers. In consequence, as Esau commented "members felt they were neglected" and often felt alienated from the union. A letter to *The Shopsteward* from a Numsa motor member in Olifantsfontein, Tlou Ramalatsoa, reflects this,

> We are active in the union and attend meetings and locals. But most of the time they talk about Seifsa. This shows that the service is not equal. We have requested the union to change our pension fund from auto workers fund to provident fund. Because of this poor service, the workers are divided. Some have left the union, others have joined the Boilermakers Union or Uwusa, others have left them all. So I request Numsa to service us better so we can call workers back to the union and unite as before.[40]

In addition differences in union styles of organising between Numsa and Micwu had to be bridged and integrated. Some organisers, especially in the Western Cape, worked hard at integrating these different traditions with some success but the exercise was daunting. Western Cape ex-Micwu official and Numsa local organiser, Malvern Arendse, described how in the period immediately after the formation of Numsa he worked to integrate the Micwu Industrial Council tradition with the Numsa tradition of developing workers' control. He focussed organisation around the implementation of the Nicmi Main Agreement. This he did through a strong emphasis on the setting up of shopsteward structures, and on the formation of street and town committees which were the equivalent in highly industrialised areas to factory and area committees. In smaller towns workers from three to four garages would come together and elect a shopsteward to represent them. In larger towns the union would sometimes organise the garage and the adjacent car sales outlet, often with the same ownership, to augment its numbers. Shopstewards, in the Numsa tradition, took direct control over the servicing of members around the Main Agreement in their workplaces,

> Mainly we were involved in dealing with complaints in terms of the Main Agreement, complaints came to the office. I was doing everything. The office was also burnt down at that time... There were general meetings every three months. People came from the region and gave reports. Meetings were for every member and they voted at general meetings for a committee. Meetings were well attended and normally held in a hotel, they had something to eat after the meeting, and wine, not strong alcohol.

: We started to talk about structures within different companies, local structures started to be built up. We had shopsteward structures in different companies with better service to members from shopstewards, problems were taken up by the organiser... Also people knew where the

> union offices were, and knew if they had a problem to come to the union office - especially where there were no shopstewards.
>
> In outlying areas at that time we tried to focus on setting up town committees... Far outlying areas, rural areas, were the responsibility of the region. These were neglected for a long time and only got attention a few years back. We went out to the rural areas twice a year, and had general meetings, and dealt with issues facing the union. It was mostly garages.[41]

Fred Petersen, a former Naawu official and later Numsa Western Cape regional secretary, recalls his experience of encountering a different culture of organisation when he started organising motor workers in the rural areas of the Western Cape,

> What was interesting for me when I started organising rural areas was Micwu's organising strategy. I went with Arthur Arendse, ex-Micwu regional organiser. He gave me some tips. First phone the employer, and second, your car must shine, you must have a tie. He would go and say 'Hello meneer [sir], how's the economy?' and get the employer on his side, then go and talk to members moving through quickly.
>
> At one stage when we went to Grapnel, we got there and I said `Do you want to introduce me to the shopsteward?' `No` the employer said, `they were all fired long ago.` We also linked up with the ANC and advice offices and other affiliates.[42]

Mike Louw, a former Micwu member, and later a Numsa shopsteward, attributed the backwardness of the sector compared to others in the union to Micwu's bureaucratic style of operation which centred on administration rather than organisation,

> We've said it before and maybe we should say officially, Micwu brought very little, besides some leadership, very little organisation and culture compared to Naawu and Mawu. We are still battling with that lack of organisation within Micwu, because of the way that they had operated...
>
> We are organised in bigger plants, but there are difficulties in smaller plants. Although the region [Western Cape] is motor dominated, it is not that way in Numsa structures. Engineering has about 8000 members, and motor about 9000. There's a lot of work that we still need to do in motor so that we can create and extend Numsa culture to motor workers. It's going to be hard work. I think that we are slowly making gains, we just have to keep on.[43]

Vazi describes how many Micwu workers regarded the union as a service organisation rather than an organisation that they controlled and belonged to them. In addition, because of the racially divided nature of the South African labour market, Vazi reflects on the difficulty of building solidarity between motor workers in the same union. This involved the Western Cape region in intensive work,

> Over the years motor workers in general have been named conservative, they relate to the union as something that they are not part of it actively. The union is the one that sorts out their medical aid, their pension monies. Because the wages become applicable through government gazette, they always think the government gives them money. For that reason over the years, for all that we've done, we have not managed to break that threshold... if you go to Chapter 1, the artisans are predominantly coloured, and some of them white, they relate to their [black] colleagues as 'boys' at work. They never saw themselves as part of the same collective even though they were part of the same union.

> We have gone out of our way to do our best. We have had continuous regional shop steward councils, sometimes good, sometimes bad. We have taken workers through processes, problems we are experiencing, shortcomings in the industry. We try and raise consciousness in terms of our union approach. Workers sometimes put company interests in front of union interests.[44]

For all these reasons the union battled to develop the sector which had obvious consequences for its strategy of creating similar wages and conditions across all its industries. It was only in 1993 that a combination of changed political circumstances, and the withdrawal of the old Micwu leadership from the union, allowed for new ideas to flow into the sector which permitted the union finally to begin to develop its weakest sector.

3. Breaking the deadlock

At Numsa's Fourth Congress in 1993, the union resolved to launch a special campaign to support motor workers as it confronted the imminent collapse of the Industrial Council. The resolution detailed a programme of action to inform motor workers of campaign issues through radio, pamphlets, stickers, special meetings in locals, marches, boycotts, demonstrations, pickets, and a day of action which would be supported by all Numsa's sectors and their local communities. Further campaign tactics included the picketing of Samiea companies who were instrumental in destroying the Nicmi, and a phone campaign to employers to interrogate them around their attitude to the Council and their role in attacking the institution.[45] Here, finally, was the sustained attempt by the union to address the fact that "...there was no real communication with the workers about what the issues were, and what the employers` attitude was." Ultimately however it was not this belated campaign that saved the Nicmi but other forces at work which put pressure on employers. As Ehrenreich explains,

> Then in 1994 with the changing government they (Samiea employers) weren't sure what was going to happen around the government prescribing certain conditions, and from their view it made much more sense to have an institution where you had a say in prescribing conditions of employment, than having government impose it. Also some of the personality differences changed completely because both on our side, and on the employers` side, the key antagonists had left and there was a completely different situation there.[46]

Ehrenreich, who believed the sector required "somebody who is dedicated, looking to strategise a way out", was appointed Motor Co-ordinator and was one of these new personalities who assisted in shifting the deadlock. He had worked as an artisan in the industry and so, as an organiser, had a comprehensive understanding of issues and problems. His approach to the Council differed from his predecessors, as he describes here,

> We accepted that we may not have the organisational strength to challenge the employers, and we adopted an attitude where we set ourselves objectives. Then we looked at achieving those

> objectives in much more incremental ways, which to some extent could be looked at as compromises - but negotiation by nature is about compromise.
>
> And an example is that we had fought for three years about setting up a 6 per cent provident fund, and because the fight was so intense there was no progress on the fund. When I came in, one of the positions of our negotiating team was to agree in principle to the provident fund, and then to phase it in over two years. Now the fund two years later is up and running at 6 per cent, whereas if we had fought to get 6 per cent immediately without having the organisational strength to back up our demands, we might still be at the same point.[47]

Ehrenreich and his national shopsteward team in the National Industry Council (NIC) developed a mutlipronged strategy for the organisation of the industry. A priority amongst these was informing membership of developments in the sector. This was effected in various ways and included the publication of a sector newspaper. In 1991 the OCB of Numsa advanced the idea of a Numsa motor newsletter to inform motor workers of developments in the sector. Over time *Numsa Motor News* became a regular and important way of keeping workers informed. Ehrenreich remembers,

> We published newsletters, clearly identifying the gains, but also challenges, facing us and some of the frustrations we met. So workers had a keen sense of what the developments are. They know what the union`s objectives are, and we're starting to instil some sense of militancy. You can't expect people to respond if they don't know what the issues are. The key thing is always to build capacity before going out and challenging employers.[48]

Numsa Motor News was distributed to every workplace and member under their personal names which was made possible through Nicmi's subscription label system. The union utilised the newsletter to advertise dates of large general meetings to be held in each region at the beginning of every year where mobilisation around negotiating demands was initiated. In addition it distributed a bargaining pamphlet to which members could refer in factory meetings. It was these sources of information that informed demands that were formulated at factory level and forwarded to Motor Local Council meetings. The Local Councils in turn forwarded demands to regional representatives who would, in a National Bargaining Forum, draw up list of consolidated national demands to take to negotiations.

In 1994 Numsa also assembled the largest negotiating team ever to have attended the Nicmi which consisted of two people from every region plus officials, 18 delegates in all, in order to ensure the broadest possible regional participation. Regional representatives reported back to shopstewards at regional meetings, who in turn, reported back to their locals and factories. In this way, for the first time, the union was obtaining clear mandates, and report-backs, from and to workers in numerous motor establishments across the country.

The next tactic in the union's new strategy centred around rescuing the Nicmi. It was the success of actions such as the McCarthy strike in 1988 that set the union on a course that was reminiscent of Mawu's strategy in the early eighties which had entailed the focussed organisation of large companies

which were influential in Seifsa. In Mawu's case this strategy was adopted in order to force plant bargaining in larger companies who could afford rates above the Industrial Council minimums whilst simultaneously forcing up minimums negotiated at Council level. In the motor case, a decade later, the strategy was designed to bolster the Council and to strengthen centralised bargaining in the industry. A July 1993 resolution on the motor sector taken at Numsa's Fourth National Congress recorded that, "The big groups must be well organised and they must be pressed to get Samiea to keep the industrial council and to settle."[49] By organising the large, and influential companies in Samiea, the union sent a clear message to other big companies that if the union did not get satisfaction at a centralised bargaining level it would win what it wanted at plant level. Thus it targeted mainly the large retailers and component companies such as the McCarthy group, Saficon, Malbak, Imperial, Barlow Motor Holdings, and Combined Motor Holdings. Such companies were powerful on the Council as they employed the majority of workers in the industry. There were other advantages too in organising large companies. A good deal of overlap in ownership existed in the industry and thus organising one company often sent a message to the managing directors of others. The union could also use agreements reached in one company, as a lever to persuade another company with the same ownership to adopt a similar agreement. Agreements across companies would also assist in building unity amongst workers across companies of similar ownership. Samcor and McCarthy, for example, belonged to Anglo American, and Malbak and McCarthy had entered into a joint Mercedes Trucks venture. By the end of 1995 Numsa had managed to organise a number of large companies on the Council but it had not built sufficient collective bargaining in enough companies to push its demands at the Nicmi in the way the engineering sector had been able to on the Nicisemi. To achieve this it had to work in a slower more incremental manner. This involved a process of 'pattern bargaining' whereby the union secured its demands at larger regional and national companies, and then pushed for the endorsement of these gains at Nicmi level, and finally had them extended to the entire industry.[50]

There were limitations to this strategy however. A number of the larger companies on the Nicmi fell under Chapter 3 which consisted of motor component manufacturers. In the past Mawu and Naawu had targeted large component plants (some Micwu companies) because they were easy to organise and harboured militant membership. It was in this period that component manufacturers agreed to plant bargain and in consequence workers had attained hours of work below industry minimums, and wages above agreed Nicmi minimum rates. Naawu workers at Willard Batteries in Port Elizabeth, for example, were the first to win a 40 hour week with no loss of pay.[51] Thus, about 40 per cent of motor component companies (about 50 companies)[52] which technically fell under the Nicmi had opted out and were engaged in plant bargaining with Numsa. This weakened the union's strategy. The motor sector of Numsa was also not the only sector that organised component companies. Workers were further divided by the existence of different national bargaining forums in the sector. Many of the

large motor component manufacturers fell under the engineering industrial council which included such companies in its scope. Approximately 60 per cent of component manufacturers fell under the Nicisemi agreement. Many in Numsa believed that all motor component workers belonged in the engineering sector and should be shifted out of the Nicmi. Organisers in the motor sector in their turn believed that body-building companies such as Busaf which could comfortably fall under Chapter 2 of the Nicmi should have been transferred to the motor sector as it needed the militancy of such workers. In their view, according to Louw, `engineering had sufficient large militant companies`.[53] At this point however the union did not apply its mind to the issue.[54] Thus workers in the motor sector were divided through the existence of differing bargaining levels and differing national industrial councils in the industry and their unity and power was reduced as a result.

Despite these limitations the union succeeded in organising a number of powerful national and regional companies in the retail and components areas such as Gabriel SA (Shock Absorbers), Smiths Automotive, Lucas Automotive, Henred Fruehauf, WC Multimech, McCarthy, Brian Porter, and William Hunt and won some significant demands especially as concerned wage increases. This created a problem for these larger companies because smaller less organised outfits undercut their wages and were able to offer services at lower rates. Suddenly the big companies developed an interest in resurrecting the Industrial Council where they could set minimum wages and benefits which would apply across the industry. There were also indications that smaller companies were anxious about the collapse of the Administrative Agreement and Samiea began talking of extending it.[55] Simultaneously motor workers were exerting pressure in other ways. Numsa's motor campaign escalated and involved thousands of workers. On 2 August 1993, for example, thousands of members all over the country marched, picketed, formed human chains, or stayed away from work to demand wage increases, the rebuilding of Nicmi, and for employers to negotiate in good faith. In Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Vereeniging, Cape Town and Pretoria workers marched and in the small rural town of Mossel Bay a total stayaway was mounted. Employers were being systematically and publicly exposed and embarrassed. By November the Industrial Council Agreement had been extended to February 1994 and serious negotiations over wages commenced for the first time in four years.[56]

Numsa now turned its attention to breaking the power of the minority white unions on the Nicmi and to democratising the Council. Firstly, it negotiated a closing date for negotiations after which either the declaration of a dispute or settlement must follow. Secondly it addressed the issue of proportional representation. From 1984 onwards both Micwu and Numsa had recruited more members than the white unions' together but because each union held one seat on the Council, the white unions could combinedly outvote Numsa on any issue. The union began to demand the restructuring of the council along the lines of proportional representation. Ehrenreich relates,

> They were screaming and kicking but the employers came out and supported us on that question because there are new employers' organisations coming into the industry, and they're going to have to share seats amongst themselves, so it makes sense to support us. So there's lot of antagonism between us [unions on the Nicmi]. This antagonism has shifted from the employers. It may not look good to side with the employers in some issues, but if you don't have the power you have to be strategic.[57]

The union made a big effort to incorporate smaller companies into the council which up to this point had been dominated by the larger companies. Numsa organisers spent time in smaller companies even if they were running a closed shop and engaged managements on the necessity for an Industrial Council in the industry. This strategy raised the profile of the union and of the usefulness of the Industrial Council and in consequence many smaller companies began to participate on the Council in order to protect themselves against the decisions of the large companies. Employers were accorded the same number of votes as the unions on the Council. New companies coming into the Council were no always happy at the way these votes were allocated and thus supported the union in its plea for proportional representation. The new chair of Samiea , Alan Taverner, also saw the advantage of a strong industrial council and supported the union's endeavours to the strengthen the institution.[58]

The next issue for the union was the implementation of the Main Agreement. In an industry such as motor which was made up of numerous small establishments where workers had little plant level power, effective implementation of the centralised agreement was crucial. Many of the smaller employers were ignorant of the Agreement's contents and racist white Nicmi agents were not concerned to inform workers of their rights or to police the Agreement in small companies. The union began by educating membership on the contents of the Agreement to enable workers to monitor it themselves. *Numsa Motor News* detailed wages in all grades accompanied by job descriptions and informed members of procedures to employ if employers were paying below the rate. Motor organisers also journeyed to rural areas to conduct week-end workshops immediately after the signing of the Agreement to familiarise members with its contents.

It then turned its attention to Nicmi agents. In meetings with employees the union reminded them that they were servants of the workers that they serviced, it was workers' subscriptions that paid their salaries. It threatened Industrial Council inspectors with dismissal if they entered into corrupt deals with employers or consistently ignored the breaking of the Agreement. Furthermore, the union had embarked on a campaign to secure shopstewards elections in every workplace. As shopstewards emerged they started laying complaints and writing to the Nicmi to report problems with employers. In time, the Council was overwhelmed with complaints and was forced to investigate companies. The union arranged a meeting in Port Elizabeth for the first time ever with Nicmi regional and general secretaries. The Motor National Shopstewards Council travelled in three combis to "read them the riot

act". Ehrenreich remembers the significance of the meeting,

> They're all conservatives on the Council [Nicmi]. The problem is that in the region some of our guys are not too familiar with the Agreement, and they are still a bit intimidated because the whole Council is white... Unless they are confident about the agreement they are not really going to react on issues. Of course nobody opened their mouth. They [Nicmi secretaries] try to be like little bosses in the region and they do all kinds of funny stuff. So we thrashed out main principle issues, also questions of affirmative action, and how they go about employing people, and none of them contested anything... It also gave the sense to our guys that these guys are not bosses...[59]

It was thus that the motor sector underwent a remarkable recovery by the mid 1990s. It remained Numsa's weakest sector but the intensive focus on the sector had removed the stigma and mythology that it was too difficult to organise and required specialised knowledge in order to make any headway.

4. Conclusion

Through a combination of changed political circumstances, new motor leadership, and a dedicated strategy and focus on the industry, the motor sector began a process of building power on the Industrial Council after a three year deadlock. Recovery in this sector was remarkably rapid when compared with Mawu and Naawu's slow incremental gains in their sectors throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. In this Numsa was assisted by a changed environment where the existence of unions, even in more remote areas, was more readily accepted. Organisers and shopstewards too, could benefit from the accumulated experience that the union now held in the organisation of its other sectors.

By 1993 Numsa's auto and engineering sectors were poised to take advantage of the union's industry restructuring and three year bargaining policies. The motor sector was not yet similarly placed but the rapid recovery of the Nicmi laid the foundations for it to at least partially engage in Numsa's new direction over the next three years. It had gained a measure of power by ensuring its bargaining outcomes would have an impact on a national scale. The following chapter will evaluate Numsa's success in negotiating its new policies in all of its sectors including in the motor sector.

ENDNOTES

[1] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
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[3] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B11.1. "Bargaining Options - Final Draft".
[4] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[5] Ibid.
[6] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Box AH 2555/B83 "National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi): Confidential: For Numsa

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[7] "Motor Industry: Know your Rights: Numsa Course on the Motor Industry Agreement" Numsa, 1998.
[8] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B67, *Numsa Motor News* "Employers out to smash Industrial Council" No 1, July 1993.
[9] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B67 *Numsa Bulletin* "Motor workers revved up" Vol 1 No 4 Nov 1990.
[15] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B11.3. "Numsa Organising and Collective Bargaining Department Report to the NOCC - 16/17 February 1991".
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[17] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B67*Numsa Motor News* October 1991.
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[20] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B11.3 "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa :Collective Bargaining".
[21] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH2555/B67 Information pamphlet No 2 14 Apr 1992 "Bosses on the attack! Workers fight back!".
[22] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH2555 /B11.3. "Numsa: Collective Bargaining: Special Update on Negotiations, June 1992".
[23] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B83 "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: Request for legal opinion: Samiea's intended withdrawal from Nicmi and the lapse of all the motor agreements on 31 August 1993".
[24] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B83 An extract from a paper prepared by JH Herdman, the Samiea President quoted in "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: Samiea is leading you into problems".
[25] Quotes in this paragraph from "Confidential: For Numsa Only: The proposed withdrawal of the South African Motor Industry Employers' Association (SAMIEA) from the National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi)" University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B83.
[26] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B67 *Numsa Motor News* "Employers out to smash Industrial Council" No 1, July 1993.
[27] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B83 "Motor Industry Fund Administrators Pty Ltd Memorandum".

[28] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B67 *Numsa: Living Wage Campaign 1993 - 1996* "Three Sectors settle".
[29] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining Box AH 2555/B67 *Numsa Motor News* "Employers out to smash Industrial Council" No 1, July 1993.
[30] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
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[32] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa AH 2555/B69 "Motor Sector CC 23-25 November 1990" in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
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[34] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
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[36] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[37] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[38] Numsa regional organiser, Nikita Vazi who joined Numsa as an organiser in the Isipingo local in KwaZulu Natal in 1986 and then moved to the Belleville local, in a Numsa Western Cape Region focus group, 1996.
[39] Interview Ekki Esau, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[40] Letter to *The Shopsteward* "Ngobuso Ubuso" Feb/March 1995.
[41] Numsa organiser, Malvern Arendse, in a Numsa Western Cape Region focus group, 1996.
[42] Numsa organiser, Fred Petersen, in a Numsa Western Cape Region focus group, 1996.
[43] Numsa shopsteward, Mike Louw, in a Western Cape Region focus group, 1996.
[44] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[45] Resolution of the 4th National Congress of Numsa, July 1993 "Resolution: Campaign in the Motor Industry", personal copy.
[46] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
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[48] Ibid.
[49] Resolution of the 4th National Congress of Numsa, July 1993 "Resolution: Campaign in the Motor Industry", personal copy.
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[52] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B67.*Numsa Bulletin* "Motor workers revved up" Vol 1 No 4 Nov 1990.
[53] Telephonic interview Mike Louw, September 2004.
[54] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[55] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B83. "National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa: Request for legal opinion: Sammie's intended withdrawal from Nicmi and the lapse of all the motor agreements on 31 August 1993".
[56] University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Collective Bargaining AH 2555/B67 *Numsa Motor News* "Victory!" No 2 November 1993.
[57] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996. Numsa won the battle for proportional representation on MIBCO (Nicmi was renamed the Motor Industry Bargaining Council in 1996).

Today employers and unions have equal representation and Numsa, which has the largest membership, has more seats than the other two unions sitting on the Bargaining Council.

[58] Telephonic interview Mike Louw, September 2004.

[59] Interview Tony Ehrenreich, Johannesburg, November 1996.

Chapter 10
Implementing a post-apartheid vision

1. Introduction

As previously outlined, Numsa confronted new concerns in the 1990s which were to affect how it continued to build power and how it utilised this power. It is useful here to explore these issues firstly by comparing the way in which Numsa had previously built power in the industry, and secondly by examining the negotiation and implementation of its new policies by means of which the union hoped to acquire much greater control over the industry and in the workplace. In the 1980s, industrial and mass action, strong democratic shopfloor structures, militant leadership, basic negotiations over procedures and wages, and growing membership were pivotal to building power in the industry in order to improve workers' conditions and defend gains made. In the 1990s, issues of union efficiency, adequate servicing of membership, mature and skilled leadership, strategic industrial action, the capacity to formulate and deliver pragmatic policies in a micro and macro economic and political context, and the ability for the union effectively to communicate with its base became crucial. It is in this context that activities pursued after the adoption of Numsa's new bargaining and industrial policies are assessed below.

In the course of this investigation a tension between earlier and later bargaining approaches will become apparent particularly in the arena of wage increases versus broader industrial restructuring. A number of labour commentators have noted the tension between a narrow focus by membership on money, and union leadership's attempt to broaden bargaining issues to deliver wider economic and political gains for their members both at the shopfloor and at a wider societal level. Some also contend that these two concerns are not necessarily polar opposites and observe that a narrow focus on higher wages in an oppressive situation can take on a symbolic character. Kornhauser has argued that, "A stated goal of higher wages may well veil unverbalized strivings for self-respect and dignity or vague hostilities towards the boss, the machine, and the entire industrial discipline. The unstated motivations may be inferred at times from the fact that the discontent continues after the wage increase is granted."[1] More abstract issues of frustrated power, inefficient production techniques, unexpressed racial hostility and so on are less easily formulated in the language and structure of collective bargaining. As Lockwood maintains, "Demands formed in terms of hours and wages conveniently define what is at stake. Precise, quantitative demands give a concreteness and urgency to the opposition groups that vaguely felt, but unfocussed, dissatisfactions about the quality of life would never do".[2] Non-wage issues are more difficult to formulate and if questions of principle are involved compromise is not easy to attain. A wage demand is easily understood by

negotiators on both sides and from the union's point of view is a claim that can more sympathetically be understood by the public than, say, issues of control in the workplace. As Wellisz puts it, "Wage demands provide an excellent rallying cry, and they are accepted by management as falling within the permissible range of labour aspirations."[3] More political or directly socialist demands may not be entertained by employers. Hence employees are obliged to frame their demands in terms that are acceptable to management. The ultimate conclusion to an unsuccessful bargaining round is the strike. Yet there are limits to what can be gained from a strike. Capitalists are not likely to capitulate to a strike demand that seeks substantial worker control over the factory. Thus such a desire will not reach the bargaining table and requires other means to be realised. Viewed in this way a wage demand or wage strike should not necessarily imply that workers are oblivious to other less negotiable matters, but rather as a decision to pursue a demand that is most easily understood.

In Numsa this tension had already surfaced before the implementation of the new bargaining programme when the union first tentatively raised non-wage restructuring issues in national negotiations. Both the 1991 industry-wide auto strike and the 1992 engineering strike demonstrated this when the strike demands which had included non-wage issues ultimately resolved themselves into an overriding demand for wage increases. It should be said however that although wages ultimately emerged as central in the auto strike, the union did attempt to deal with the non-wage issue of unemployment through its attainment of a year long retrenchment moratorium. Ultimately though, this did not produce deeper structural changes to the economy and was more of a holding operation before the swollen river again broke its banks.

In 1993 Numsa embarked on a process of negotiating its new restructuring programme, which embraced a range of non wage issues, in each of the national centralised bargaining forums in which it was participating. In the following sections Numsa's success in negotiating this programme at industry level will be assessed. In each sector the union aimed to bargain framework agreements which would guide shop stewards in negotiating detailed arrangements at plant level. This was achieved with varying degrees of success but all were characterised by a fragmented acceptance of Numsa's vision. As Numsa's National Treasurer Omar Gire observed, "In the end you sit with something that you didn't really want but you've got some of those principles."[4] In engineering, for example, Gire expressed the fear that employers were agreeing to some elements of the programme without narrowing wage differentials, or granting access to training. Following this assessment an examination will be made of the success in implementing the bargaining programme, guided by these national framework agreements, at the workplace level.

2. Negotiating change in motor

From late 1994 onwards, through negotiations on the Nicmi, wages and working conditions began to improve for workers in the motor sector. The union had also succeeded in strengthening and restructuring the Industrial Council which was critical in enabling a more co-operative approach to negotiations and for enhancing the possibility of negotiating aspects of the three year bargaining programme.

In October 1994, in response to Numsa's intensifying campaign against employers on the Nicmi, employers finally sat down to serious negotiations. Numsa's demands focussed on the battle to narrow the apartheid wage gap in the industry through a strategy of negotiating lower artisanal increases and higher increased minima for low paid workers. It noted that artisans were earning five times more than general workers, and managers 17 times what general workers earned.[5] Ehrenreich commented, "The reality is that the artisans in the industry all earn way above the minimum so whether it's 10 or 8 per cent it does not make any difference."[6] After five months of negotiations, the declaration of a dispute, and subsequent mediation, an agreement was finally signed on 24 April, 1995. The agreement gave workers between 13 and 20 per cent wage increases on the minima. Low paid workers received the highest percentage. The Main Agreement was finally gazetted on 27 June 1995 after 3 years of no improvements.[7] The union however had to ensure that its artisanal membership did not feel that it was not representing its interests and hence it engaged the Council on such issues as the reduction of working hours, tool and standby allowances, bonuses, and improvements to the medical aid and pension funds.

Some workers below artisan level in the bargaining unit, particularly in the motor components and larger engineering companies, were however dissatisfied with the union's wage policy. The union's policy in the motor sector was to bargain wages centrally and progressively to do away with plant level negotiations. In motor however the union bargained minima alone and did not employ workers' actual wages, as in auto and engineering, as its point of departure. For some members an increase on the minimum meant an actual increase. Others however had negotiated increases at plant level far in excess of Nicmi minima. As in the auto sector, but to an even greater degree, profit levels in the motor industry varied greatly. Higher paid workers thus felt aggrieved that the union wished to maintain them at industry level wage rates where increases were set at what the weakest companies could afford and what the lowest paid earned. Again, Numsa experienced the contradictions of its wage solidarity policy. In its efforts to prevent the emergence of a worker elite and of attempting to equalise wages across all its sectors, it was allowing certain companies to pay way below profit levels. The union responded by demanding on the Nicmi that

the point of departure for negotiations should be actual wages earned in the industry. Even this, however, failed to satisfy workers who believed that if they continued to negotiate at plant level they could wrest a more sizeable chunk of profits from employers. Previously, many employers refused to negotiate wages at plant level, but this had changed. During the three year period when the Council deadlocked many shopstewards had opened their own plant negotiations. Thus a number of employers had adjusted to this process and even after the Nicmi had been resurrected, Ehrenreich commented, "Now it is clear that we have the right to bargain at plants. People are in fact more and more starting to do that."[8]

The motor sector also worked hard at achieving parity in working conditions with other sectors of the union. Successes in Numsa's other sectors in the attainment of specific worker rights provided an important benchmark in negotiations on the Nicmi. For years, employers on Samiea had been contributing 6 per cent of white workers' wages into a pension fund but had never considered the pension or unemployment needs of black workers. In 1996 after negotiations which had spanned a number of years the union won the choice for black workers to join a pension or provident fund to which employers would contribute up to 6 per cent. It also won maternity benefits of 75 per cent of wages for six months, improved sick and medical aid provisions, and an end to racially based benefits in the industry.[9]

The sector embraced the training and career-pathing policies of the three year bargaining programme with some success. Under the Apprenticeship Act, the motor industry had constituted an Apprenticeship Committee which granted contracts of apprenticeship. For many years the Mieu enjoyed sole representation on the Committee and it blocked the entry of black workers by arguing that most companies did not have black artisans to train them. In consequence, except for some coloured entrants, most artisans, such as motor mechanics, panel beaters, and automotive electricians, were white. Micwu's Des East recalls, "...a white artisan told me how Mieu had threatened to kick him out of the union if he didn't stop training coloured artisans. If he had been kicked out he would have lost pension, and medical aid, because it was a non-party shop."[10] Esau also remembers, "Employers would still prefer to pay higher wages for a white guy with a Standard 7 or 8 than employ a coloured guy who had a Standard 10 [matriculation school exit]. So you'd have a guy with a Standard 10 becoming a delivery guy. Companies like McCarthy for instance would not promote a black guy. A white who was absolutely useless, immaterial of his ability would be promoted to foreman."[11] Many black workers could, and did, perform all the tasks required of the artisan in their sector but without the formal certification they were not entitled to higher wages.

Numsa utilised the Nicmi where the employer association, Samiea, covered eleven employer bodies across the industry, as the most appropriate forum to address the issue of restructuring

training and the industry training board. In discussions agreement was reached on a competency based modular training system containing four levels. If a worker passed the fourth year, he/she became an artisan. Previously workers in the industry were sent on full pay to a technicon training institution for three years to become an artisan. The new system involved on the job training and linked the four levels with the five grade structure in the industry thus establishing a broad band grading system linked to pay. Employers also agreed to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) principle which allowed workers to be re-graded and to enter the training system at their level of knowledge. Employers were obliged to increase wages if they were graded upwards.[12]

The Motor Industry Training Board immediately embarked on modularising the curriculum for training an apprentice to artisan. Technical committees were appointed which included a number of Numsa artisans who had worked with Adrienne Bird and had a clear understanding of the union's aims. The Training Board established pilot projects to test its modular designs which included a bridging course for workers who needed academic background, and adult basic education to assist workers to become functionally literate. By 1995 it was clear that the motor sector was progressing more rapidly in the area of training than other sectors of the union and it was doing so ironically because it lacked the strength in its centralised bargaining forum that other sectors had. As Ehrenreich explains,

> There's been a big noise about the engineering pilot project and they're now learning from us and starting to use some of the things we've done. There's a lot of co-operation... The advantage was that things actually got done. We were not strong enough to always push our agenda and hold things up to see what NTBs [National Training Boards] and SAQA [SA Qualifications Act] were going to do. These boere [Afrikaners] just pushed ahead, which in hindsight wasn't a bad thing because it is technical stuff. It`s not a contested area so it will be easy to bring up to SAQA standards afterwards. Then you can amend as you go along... So the blocks are starting to fall into place and I think training has gone a long way in the industry.[13]

The success of Numsa's various endeavours on the Council had a dynamic effect on membership according to Ehrenreich. By the end of 1995, two years after the Councils reclamation, he could claim that, "The council as an institution I think is very strong, and they are very well organised, they are very efficient. I have some experience of engineering and I think it`s much stronger than engineering. We managed to assert ourselves strongly on the Council over the last two years. I do not think that the employers would walk away from that."[14] Louw and Vazi attested to growing strength in motor factories which were drawing confidence from the union's newly acquired power on the Nicmi. The weakest and most vulnerable membership began to assert their organisational ability and rights in the workplace. Mike Louw and Nikita Vazi recounted,

> Even people in rural areas who are more oppressed, take strength from what has happened at national level. We were quite surprised, for example at Vredendal, when we got there, those people had organised everything, organised the hall, operating as a committee, proud, assertive in that regard. They can teach us a lot in the urban areas. (Mike Louw)

> Our motor members are starting to stand up for their rights. In the past there was still that culture that the union is something separate from them. Especially in rural areas, people are starting to stand up for their rights. My experience is that these people are becoming more committed and they are attending more regular meetings. They are prepared to fight for their rights. (Nikita Vazi)[15]

The changes in the industry, however great, were still mainly of a basic nature. Rights that were being won, and the confidence they were beginning to engender in workers, were rights that had been won in many engineering and auto companies by the mid 1980s. The access of black workers to further training and the flattening of the wage curve were clearly part of a more advanced strategy but the union was essentially still battling to ensure that basic workplace rights were put in place and that the Main Agreement was adequately policed. The integrated nature, or nexus of demands, of the three year bargaining programme was lost. It was not a programme but a set of individual bargaining demands. Issues of increased control in predominantly white racist establishments through the flattening of hierarchies were still far from being negotiated. Many workplaces in the sector were micro in scale and operated in an oppressive racist context where owners were not open to concepts of shared decision-making and joint control. A further problem was that in an industry characterised by small workplaces training did not open up promotional opportunities and in a jobless economy few skilled positions existed to which workers could progress even if newly acquired skills were portable. The union's only option in the motor industry at this point was to negotiate national standards and to police them as effectively as possible.

3. Negotiating change in auto

Bargaining the 3 year programme in 1993

By 1991 the union was beginning to engage employers on the National Bargaining Forum (NBF) in discussions on the future of the auto industry. This was not in any measure a co-determinist relationship as employers were reluctant partners and negotiations were characterised by a combination of co-operation, open discussion, and mutual recognition of the crisis in the industry, combined with adversarial bargaining and high levels of confrontation.

The ground for negotiating the union's three year bargaining programme had been partially laid in the 1991 and 1992 negotiations. Here mediation after strike action had resulted in a moratorium on retrenchments and in a jointly controlled Industry Training Board, and in 1992 to the union's right to challenge retrenchment decisions. The 1993 negotiations continued in this spirit of constructive engagement. The final agreement endorsed a range of restructuring issues contained in the three year programme, most significantly in the areas of training, grading, certification and narrowing the apartheid wage gap. Employers agreed to a 10 per cent actual increase on wages which approximated the rise in the inflation rate.[16] In a significant move they also agreed to the

establishment of a 7 grade structure with five grades across the industry up to artisan which incorporated a 10 per cent differential on minimums between grades. This involved the union in reducing the grades to five skills-based grades, from the existing 13 task-based grades incorporating over 300 classifications.[17] National negotiator, Gavin Hartford, described the mammoth exercise the union undertook to achieve this,

> Now the focus was on the issue of concertinering 12 levels into 5 levels. We went through every job in the industry and we allocated them into 5 levels. Hundreds of meetings with every employer disagreeing on the levels. We had to do the basic `learn your memberships' jobs` story.
>
> It was a question of knowing everyone's rate in the industry, and what we discovered was horrifying - which was that there were huge wage spreads. What had been happening was every time there was an increase, the bosses would go back and take a few guys and add more money for them. So there were huge actual wage spreads so we had to flatten that into this five level structure. We tried to give real wages at the bottom, and people high up got the same as the bottom, but in cash as a bonus. So they didn't get it on their basic rate. So we were slowing down the movement of their basic rate, and adding to the hourly rate at the bottom. It wasn't a complete success but we did it.[18]

In addition agreement was reached on the establishment of South Africa's first industry-wide agency shop whereby non-union members would pay a bargaining fee of R 4,75 deducted from their weekly pay. The agency shop deductions were paid into a National Bargaining Forum account which allocated funds to unions in the bargaining unit depending on membership numbers. This was a significant boost to covering Numsa's bargaining expenses. Contributions amounted to R1,5 million per annum of which Numsa received over 90 per cent because of the preponderance of its 18 500 members in the 26 000 member bargaining unit.[19]

The agreement also gave substance to the 1992 in principle settlement to establish an Auto Industry Education and Training Board. Agreement was reached on the recognition of prior learning, career progression, an education and skills audit of each employee at plant level, an audit of available training resources, the development of a broad framework which included core modules, specialisation modules, and plant specific modules and the development of competency outcomes, and resources to facilitate literacy and numeracy training. Employees involved in training would be entitled to 2 modules before June 1995 and a further two modules by June 1996. The union did not however win paid secondment leave for shopstewards to assist in the building of union capacity.[20] Employers needed workers' skills but not a stronger union.

Bargaining the programme in 1994

The 1994 bargaining round was not as consensual. Prior to negotiations auto shopstewards took the decision to push through the remaining three year bargaining demands which had not been agreed in the previous year's negotiations. A year of the 3 year programme had already elapsed and the union required an adequate period of implementation before it expired. Thus it was

essential that the outstanding legs of the programme be adopted. A dispute soon erupted which centred around the time frame for narrowing the apartheid wage gap, the implementation of skills development programmes, as well as an inflation-linked wage combined with a small improvement factor. Auto employers had agreed in principle on narrowing the wage gap, but the union now demanded a three year time-frame in which to implement whilst employers wanted a four-year period. At the outset Numsa demanded a 23 per cent wage increase which it adjusted during the course of negotiations to 12 per cent. Membership were not prepared to reduce their demand further especially as food inflation had risen by 11,5 per cent and in the previous two years members had accepted increases below the rate of inflation. Employers offered a 10,5 per cent increase. The union declared a dispute.[21]

Over a three day period Numsa balloted members on strike action and 76 per cent voted in favour. It was the first industry-wide strike to transpire in post-apartheid South Africa and many saw it as a test of worker independence from the ANC. Accusations of disloyalty to the new government and of destroying the economy instead of reconstructing it were levelled at Numsa by comrades in government and the community. Workers were not intimidated. During the strike Numsa organised a march of Volkswagen and Delta workers to the companies' head offices which was delayed for two hours because of a bus drivers` strike. Finally, at the end of the march, John Gomomo, a Volkswagen shopsteward and Cosatu president, told the crowd of 1 500 striking workers, "We are accused of undermining the same government that we put into power. We reject that. What we want it is to do away with inherited apartheid, and we are going to use our forces to force the employers back to the negotiating table."[22]

The strike of 25 000 workers continued for an astonishing five weeks and not surprisingly there were cracks in worker unity during the strike. In the fourth week Mercedes Benz workers indicated a desire to return to work whilst Volkswagen members expressed continued unhappiness with what employers were offering. It was at Toyota in Durban, however, that unity unravelled most dramatically. Some time before the national strike, Toyota members and management had been locked into a range of disputes which resulted in go-slows and demonstration stoppages. Disputes centred around dismissals, wages, provident fund contributions, car leases, medical aid plans, racism in promotions, and lack of training. The industry-wide strike which contained a national demand to close the gap between grades and to implement training and promotion opportunities as soon as possible raised tensions further. A small group of a few hundred younger workers demanded less emphasis on `education packages and other nonsense` [23] and more on wages. Another larger group of workers wanted to settle for less, and settle quickly. The shop stewards at Toyota were caught between the two groups. At one point the younger workers and union officials had an argument over a march to Durban which culminated in members trashing the union offices.[24]

In other respects the strike forged an important area of worker unity. Prior to the strike a high degree of enmity between Numsa and Yster en Staal existed. This was partly because Yster was racially constituted as an all white union and partly because Yster members had benefited from increases and improved work conditions for which Numsa members had struggled. Initially Yster rejected solidarity with Numsa strikers and attempted to settle with employers on the NBF, but in a sudden reversal, with the employers' final offer on the table, they decided to support Numsa's 12 per cent demand. They appeared at negotiations chanting slogans in Afrikaans which were associated with Numsa and anti-apartheid struggles such as `Die stryd gaan voort` (the struggle continues) and `Viva Numsa!` Yster's chief negotiator, Johan Prinsloo, spoke of its support for the new government, and Numsa president Mtutuzeli Tom made an emotional speech to Numsa workers informing them that Yster and Staal members were workers, and needed to be treated with respect. Numsa workers began to welcome these white workers into their strike ranks.[25]

In the second week of the strike, the union's negotiating team led by Hartford and Tom, posited the idea of separating the wage dispute from wage policy, `Our priority was to try to settle the strike.` said Hartford.[26] Their proposal was to establish a study group to report in 1995 on the most effective way of overcoming the apartheid wage gap. In return, they requested management to settle at 12 per cent. Auto employers were not receptive and reasserted their view that the best method of restructuring the industry was to lower production costs by lowering wages. A wage increase above the inflation rate, they asserted, would significantly raise production costs and they warned the union that in the new South Africa wage increases would not come through strike action. Union negotiators insisted that wage restraint should not form the basis of industry restructuring. They pointed out that research had indicated that employers could afford the union's demand and that their intransigence was based on a matter of principle rather than on the ability to pay. Mercedes Benz for example, it argued, had grossed a record R435 million that year, and worker productivity levels were rapidly reaching international quantity standards.[27] The strike unfolded into a trial of strength.

Ultimately, the strike's length forced employers to retreat and a final settlement of 10,5 per cent was reached. This was the highest ever increase on actual rates in the auto industry but it remained open to question whether the strike was a victory.

It was exceptionally long for an industry-wide strike resulting in workers losing more than a month's wages (R91 million). It cost employers R2,7 billion and the state lost more than R400 million in VAT, PAYE and excise duties.[28] After the strike Numsa's general secretary Enoch Godongwana expressed reservations about its outcomes, "We need to re-evaluate our mobilisation strategies and the traditions we come from...Reconstruction and growth are the key issues"[29] He

was referring to the fact that ultimately, the strike, as in 1991, had resolved into a simple wage dispute. So why did employers and the union lose sight of these restructuring issues and risk such devastating losses?

Part of the answer lay in the union's lack of preparation for a strike of such length. In the same year South Africa had witnessed its first democratic elections, and Godongwana commented, "We under-estimated the expectations that would be unleashed by democracy."[30] The union had believed the strike would be quick and easily won. It was not prepared for the toughness of the employers' stand. Another reason lay in employer perceptions of Numsa's aims. Toyota's Harry Gazendam, who was also vice-president of the Automobile Manufacturers Employers Organisation, believed the union should be taught a lesson because it perceived the auto employers as a `soft touch` and used its bargaining outcomes to set standards in all Numsa's sectors. He also believed Numsa wanted a victory before attending Cosatu Congress later that year.[31]

The union had undertaken little preparation for the strike. Referring to the Durban Toyota workers Godongwana commented that members had not fully internalised the union's wage policy and commented, "Once you are in a conflict situation workers forget everything except money."[32] He believed that the union had `lost control` of the strike agenda and that the straight wage demand had compromised its restructuring programme. During negotiations it had embarrassingly requested that employers utilise their contribution to the Work Security Fund, negotiated and established in 1992 to retrain retrenched workers, to raise their 10.5 per cent offer to the 11 percent demanded at that point by the union. The Fund had been a pioneering agreement, but now it appeared that the union was willing to sacrifice its restructuring policies.

During the strike, the gap between the employers' and the union's vision of restructuring the industry was starkly illustrated and the union struggled to move beyond this impasse. Employers wanted a moratorium on industrial action, wage restraint and more productive workers whilst Numsa aimed to curtail management control over production, increase skills, and to lay the basis for industrial democracy. Furthermore both the union and employers were struggling to comprehend the implications of the union's demands. "Employers were having real difficulties making the complex calculations over cost implications of reducing the time frame [for narrowing the apartheid wage gap] from four to three years. On our side we could not cope with an agreement with so many variables covering such a long period." commented Hartford.[33]

Numsa was now confronted with the question of how to pursue its strategy for industry restructuring. Its restructuring proposals were complex involving links between training, career-pathing, reducing wage-gaps and the restructuring of work organisation. It was now apparent that such proposals would necessitate a number of years to negotiate and implement. Membership

wanted to see immediate results and such long-term programmes made it difficult to mobilise worker support especially as auto employers had not yet embraced the new proposals. The union leadership was faced with the realisation that only worker power would force employers to adopt its new vision and this entailed linking longer term complex proposals, with mobilisation over short term demands, in particular wages. Sustaining a balance between short term, and long term demands, was however a difficult task as the union had learnt in the strike. It was confronted with the question of whether the tactics employed in the 1980s of mobilisation, resistance and militancy around wage demands could achieve the union's new restructuring goals in the 1990s.[34]

The union started to raise the question of whether restructuring issues, and wages and conditions should not be negotiated in different forums. Having confronted employer resistance to its restructuring programme, it began to wonder if its energies would not be more fruitfully employed in making a single broad demand for the right to engage in restructuring issues. To reach that goal it believed state intervention was necessary. If the right to engage on such questions was conceded in a tripartite forum it could avert costly strikes to force employers to negotiate over wage gaps, training, affirmative action, access to information and numerous other restructuring issues.

The union was already actively engaging in a Motor Industry Task Group (MITG) which the Minister of Trade and Industry, Derek Keys had appointed in late 1992. It sent two powerful delegates to the forum, namely Les Kettledas and Alec Erwin. The MITG's brief was to address the problems of inefficiencies in the industry, oversupply in the market, rising vehicle prices, the decline in market sales, productivity issues and the increase in job losses. The Task Group included amongst others representatives from assemblers, component manufacturers, trade unions, the Automobile Association, the Industrial Development Corporation, the Motor Industry Federation (MIF) and government. At its first meeting in November 1992 the Task Team was given the mandate of advising the minister on the future of the auto industry including importantly, making recommendations around job maintenance and creation.[35] Its May and June 1993 meetings noted the industry's potential for economic growth, employment creation and human resources development and its potential impact on South Africa's balance of payments. It also set out its objectives which included the advisability of reducing the number of motor vehicle models; the importance of rendering vehicles, parts and accessories affordable; the need to investigate international trends in auto manufacturing and trade, including the nature of GATT obligations; the need for a simple, transparent, affordable, and easy-to-administer programme; and the establishment of a Motor Industry Authority (MIA) invested with statutory powers to ensure agreed objectives in the Motor Industry Development Programme (consisting of two sub-authorities: Automative Technology Authority and Automative Training Authority) were achieved within a specified time frame.[36] The Task Group set about its tasks with considerable energy and through the creation of Longterm and Short-term Working Groups immediately

commissioned a number of in-depth studies and soon began to make recommendations to the minister.[37]

In the wake of the strike the union believed that a statutory MIA located in the Ministry of Trade and Industry would be the appropriate vehicle for obliging employers to deal with restructuring issues. It would play the crucial role of facilitating the convergence of different stakeholders in transforming the industry.

The strike had also raised issues around centralised bargaining for both employers and the union. Toyota's Harry Gazendam articulated problems with Numsa's approach to centralised bargaining, "Everything must be the same in the industry. This is reflected in their approach to team-work. Numsa insists the guidelines must be laid down at national level. This results in a bizarre attempt to take companies with German and Japanese cultures and produce a homogeneity."[38] He believed that the NBF should focus on issues such as retirement provisions, health care, general training matters, housing, job security, and creating a framework of minimum standards, including wages. Plant level bargaining, on the other hand, should deal with such areas as productivity which could incorporate benefits for workers so that a culture of identifying with the company's goals could be developed. The union was also questioning "the balance between centralised and plant level bargaining". Numsa organiser, Chris Lloyd expressed this in the following fashion,

> The obsession with pure centralised bargaining is not in the interest of members. And I'm well qualified to say this, because I come from a country [Australia] that centrally bargained everything, even national wage outcomes throughout the whole economy. The result of that seven year bargaining contract of bargaining actual wages centrally was that members lost interest in their union. What was the purpose? There was no struggle on the ground. Centralised bargaining is a recipe for losing touch with members. If you have minimums bargained centrally, and actuals at plant level, you're in touch with members. You've got to service them, you've got to come up with new ideas on how they bargain.[39]

The union began to question whether a sole centralised bargaining forum in auto was desirable if it was to wrest maximum control and benefits from companies (although it also advocated centralised bargaining in engineering and motor in reality these sectors bargained at both levels). It noted that many European countries compromised between centralised and decentralised wage fixing in a two tiered bargaining system. The principle was to set broad minimum floors for wages, conditions and skills across the country or a sector and for this minimum floor to be improved upon at plant level sometimes through productivity deals. This would allow workers in cyclical sectors of the metal industry to take advantage of the company's increased productivity and profitability whilst removing unsustainable pressure on national negotiations when certain companies' or sectors' profitability was lower. The two tiered system would also put an end to perpetual arguments around regional wages and individual exemptions. In countries with a two tiered system, such as Germany, wage solidarity was strong and the metal union bargained in a

single national forum (auto, engineering and motor combined) so that the weak were supported by the strong. This system, it further argued, would lend more power to shop stewards and local level unionism and ensure a union with a dynamic base.[40]

Finally, it should be said that to evaluate any strike in isolation, especially an industry wide strike, is to limit a full understanding of its overall impact on the industry and employers. As long ago as 1899 Marshall observed that "There is no advantage in comparing the expense of a particular strike with the total direct gain to wages ....because a strike is a mere incident in a campaign, and the policy of keeping an army and entering a campaign has to be judged as a whole. The gain of any particular battle is not to be measured by the booty got in it."[41] Crouch too refers to "the collective gain to the union which follows from the demonstration of its power."[42] The 1994 strike was indeed part of an on-going "campaign", which included discussions in the MITG, the effects of which were apparent in the 1995 round of negotiations. In this year the union finally entered serious discussions with employers on restructuring the auto industry. "For three years now" commented Cosatu's mouthpiece *The Shopsteward*, "Numsa has been fighting to fundamentally change the structure of the industries where it bargains. This agreement achieves a lot of what Numsa has been fighting for. Numsa believes that if it had not had a tough six week strike last year, this Agreement would not have been signed."[43]

Negotiating change in 1995

The 1995 bargaining round produced what appeared to be the perfect agreement which incorporated most elements of the three year strategy. On narrowing the wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers, the agreement set targets which stipulated the attainment of 10 per cent differentials between the five grades by 1998. By the end of the following three years, the bottom grade, level 1, would be earning 60 per cent of the artisan rate, level 2 would be at 70 percent of the artisan rate, level 4 at 80 percent of the artisan rate, and level 5 at 90 per cent of the rate. At the time, there were differences of up to 35 per cent between wages in the same grade. Employers accepted the union's formula for meeting these targets over the following three years by granting an increase of 2 per cent above inflation each year for grades 1- 4. In effect this entailed 7 800 low paid workers (about 30 per cent of workers in the industry) receiving real wage increases for three years. Artisans and technicians in grades 5 - 7 would get an increase of 1 per cent below inflation. This would result in a 20 percent differential between grades 5 and 7.[44] Hartford discusses the significance for the union of flattening the wage curve,

> We worked out a way to pick up the lower paid very fast, and freeze the top, and flatten the pay structure on every grade so that there was no more than a 10 per cent differential on a particular grade in terms of a wage spread. This was creating real wage solidarity amongst the members. And taking out levels from the bottom so you don't allow the employer to employ at the bottom. They can only employ at level two.
>
> The strategic objective in auto was to have one rate. One level five rate, one level two

> rate, because there can't be a better way to organise workers than to have them all earning the same. You can't have higher levels of solidarity. The reality was that it started to happen and at MB [Mercedes Benz], today, [1996] there are four levels and they're moving to three or two.[45]

In return the union agreed to a no strike clause over the following three years on any issue where there was agreement, including wages. Workers could however embark on industrial action, after mediation, on issues not covered in the national agreement such as productivity gains and targets, racist foremen or failure to implement the agreement.

Employers had previously agreed to establish and finance an Industry Education and Training Board which would ensure that all employees would achieve Adult Basic Education within six years up to the equivalent of Grade 9 in the formal education system. In addition they had agreed that the new five grade wage system would be skills-based and not task-based. The 1995 agreement took the training issue further. By the end of the year, the company would assess all workers for their level of skill which would culminate in nationally recognised certificates acknowledging these skills. The agreement gave the existing workforce two possible career paths. The first entailed enrolment in formal training, which, on course completion would immediately result in increased pay. In each grade a maximum and minimum rate of pay would be stipulated and workers who had undergone formal training would immediately progress to the maximum pay rate in that grade. They would receive payment for the skills attained regardless of whether they utilised them or not. For workers who did not wish to embark on formal training, in some cases due to age, an alternative career path was available. They could learn new tasks and operations needing a higher, or additional level of skill, on the job and would progress from grade to grade on the minimum rate. They would be awarded higher wages only for skills in immediate use. All new workers however would have to proceed along the formal training route.[46]

Some employers however did not require more highly trained workers and this led to tensions on the NBF with employers who required a highly trained, multi-skilled workforce. The union was concerned that those employers who needed a less skilled workforce by not making provision for training would disadvantage workers in the case of retrenchment as they would have few portable skills. In consequence agreement was reached on a guarantee that every employee would be entitled to four modules (160 hours) of training by 1996. Full-time shop stewards would be responsible for co-ordinating training and other education and training details would be negotiated at plant level and would take into account company finances, work-loads and levels of need.

In addition the agreement dealt with the difficult issue of productivity targets. It outlined guidelines for negotiating productivity, changes in work organisation, and a performance-based pay system. It stipulated that any change in productivity arrangements must ensure job security

and that changes in work organisation, for example changes in shift patterns, must be negotiated with the union which would be provided with any relevant information to make informed decisions jointly with the company. Numsa was not successful, however in reaching agreement on guidelines for how work-teams should operate, where for example, it recommended the election and rotation of team leaders. It was also not successful in securing an agreement on guidelines for performance-based pay systems. An agreement was however reached on remuneration related to productivity which would be in addition to a workers' routine wages.[47]

The union negotiated three hours paid time every three months to report to members on issues related to work organisation and employers agreed to train shopstewards in this area. Agreement was reached on a tripartite (employers, government, unions) Motor Industry Authority (MIA) whose function would be to develop industrial policy on tariffs, develop a database and research capacity for employers and unions, and advise government. Finally the agreement stipulated that the NBF should include tyre, motor components, and other sectors linked to auto manufacturing. In the tyre and rubber agreement of that year, employers agreed to the same principles laid out in the auto agreement.

This was a ground-breaking agreement both in content and in the manner of reaching agreement. It was an important break with the adversarial culture of previous years and represented Numsa's first significant move towards a co-determinist approach to dealing with the industry. The agreement depended on the continued building of a co-operative relationship with employers in a range of areas especially training and productivity, and reinvested plant bargaining and rank and file membership participation with something of its former importance. Centralised negotiations on the NBF allowed for the development of framework agreements which would later guide shop stewards in negotiating detailed arrangements at plant level. The union had struggled for three years to persuade employers of the logic of their restructuring proposals, it had now substantially succeeded in this task. The issue was now one of implementation. Did the union have the skills and capacity to assist and advise shopstewards in complex plant level negotiations, especially when so much of the agreement was new to leadership, organisers and membership?

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the successful or unsuccessful implementation of this restructuring agreement but in 1995 there were strong indications of future success. Firstly, a limited number of large employers operated in the industry and in the main they had come to accept the logic of the union's restructuring plans including the involvement of the state in reconstituting the industry. Secondly, the auto sector by virtue of its compactness, limited size, and homogeneity in production methods, allowed for the real possibility of future consensus amongst employers. Once they had sensed the seriousness of the unions' intentions to rebuild the industry, they began to recognise the benefits of its programme to the survival and future

profitability of the sector. It was the union that through its persistence had brought a vision to the embattled industry and had created a platform where this vision could be negotiated. It recognised the dangers for its members in opening the industry to global competition but it believed that this created more opportunities than threats, and that the increased opportunities for the workforce to make decisions at the point of production would protect them from the ravages of globalisation. The union had not however managed to negotiate an industry-wide framework for plant level restructuring. Thus despite its apparent comprehensiveness, the agreement's lack of clarity and focus on the factory level, held many dangers for workers.

Dangers for workers

Restructuring and workplace change had long been on the table in the auto sector. In 1984 Volkswagen shopsteward John Gomomo, had expressed the union's response to company restructuring plans,

> Management tells us that they must introduce new technology and cut jobs in order to keep up with Toyota and Sigma and overseas firms... Recently management has proposed the lay-off of some workers... At a mass meeting workers rejected this. We stick to the decision to work only four days and every worker remains in the plant...
>
> We have demanded access to the company's future plans...We insist that every new machine has to be discussed with the union. Also we demand that money saved by increased production should be used for the training of workers. We demand to see the annual budget for training. This is important to make skilled jobs available to all workers. Management has to justify all promotions to make sure there is no discrimination.
>
> There has been some automation in the body shop with work on the new Audi and a little on the assembly line. Recently we have conceded the need for robotic welding of rear axles. Six guys jobs are affected here. But manual welding could not guarantee a consistently high quality... We had to allow this change in order to maintain quality.
>
> Again we have been negotiating over a computerised clocking system. Our position is that we will agree to it if it simply replaces the functions of the original mechanical time clocks. If the company tries to use if for anything new - like controlling the movement of workers between different areas - then we will refuse to use them.
>
> Management has attempted to introduce quality circles. The shopstewards see this as an attempt to by-pass union structures. It is an attempt to slowly draw workers away from the union. We have rejected these attempts. Shopstewards and the branch must be involved in any new structures.[48]

Here the union was already dealing with many of the elements of Numsa's three year bargaining programme which it would introduce a decade later. Issues of training in response to technological innovation, the need for the union to engage in management's restructuring plans through the provision of company information, and questions of workplace reorganisation and flattening hierarchies were already on the agenda. The difference in 1993 however was that the union was now recognising technological innovation as an inevitability and accepting that although it entailed job loss in the short term the industry, by becoming competitive on global markers, would

ultimately create jobs. In the arena of workplace reorganisation in 1984 the union rejected attempts at participatory management as an attempt to 'by-pass' the union. A decade later the union was viewing such innovations as a means of attaining more control on the factory floor through the flattening of hierarchical structures. For workers in the auto sector familiarity with many of the concepts that the union was propounding in the early 1990s, combined with high levels of technological innovation, meant that the three year bargaining plan had its greatest opportunity for success here out of all the union's sectors. Restructuring attempts in Mercedes Benz in the early 1990s illustrate some of the successes and dilemmas for the union in the implementation of its policies in the auto sector.

By the end of the 1980s Mercedes Benz management was forced to acknowledge that it had lost control of the factory floor. In response, the company introduced a new chairman, Christoph Kopke, to rescue a company that was `just about dead`.[49] Kopke believed that many of the company's shopfloor difficulties resulted from ineffective management. He thus utilised the 1990 dispute between workers and the union, when the union was in a weak bargaining position, to regain control of the shopfloor. After the strike the company negotiated a new recognition agreement which was one of the most advanced in the country. It gave the union, for example, the right to strike without dismissals, and the right to picket. In return the company required shopfloor discipline including that workers start on time, and the reduction of absenteeism. Kopke aimed to create an equitable shopfloor environment where production targets reached competitive levels. He commented on production rates in the context of the Mercedes Benz built by workers for Nelson Mandela in 1990, "Since 1987 we have never achieved our weekly production targets. Five years ago the Honda plant built 70 Hondas a day. In 1988 workers said they were working too hard, and since then we've only built 40 a day...That car [Mandela's] came off the line with 9 faults. In this company cars don't come off the line with less than 68 faults. In Germany, about 13 faults. Normally it takes 14 days to build a car - Mandela's was built in four days!"[50]

To achieve greater efficiencies, the company began a process of consultation, evaluation and restructuring with the union. It proposed flattening the organisational structure which would entail workers making more decisions with less supervision. It agreed to `upgrade the performance and understanding of supervisors`[51] and to develop training programmes which could enable further promotion in the company. Thereafter he aimed to address the adversarial relationships that had developed between the union and the company and to confront the racist culture of the organisation. Commented Kopke, "Since I've been here we've taken some drastic action against management. We fire managers who are racist."[52] In this regard both the company and union acknowledged that the relationship between supervisor and worker was at the core of many industrial relations problems. Mtutuzeli Tom explained, "The problem is not top management's. They see the sufferings of the workers, but they don't pass the message to their subordinates.

Lower management still sees workers just as tools without human dignity."[53] In Tom's assessment these initiatives which had been co-determined by the union and management greatly improved relations on the shopfloor.

Ostensibly the Mercedes restructuring was successful, but had the union won significant levels of control or had the company merely taken back control? It was true that workers found themselves in a more amenable environment but what was the nature of the control they had won? After the 9 week strike in 1987 Tom had declared. "Numsa became very powerful. Workers felt they could control the plant."[54] By 1990 Numsa members were back at their posts under pressure to be more productive. They had not employed their power, for example, to win a greater say in how the company was managed, or in how profits were invested and distributed. Their power had been focussed on intimidating line management and winning higher wages. A few black workers had entered into managerial positions, chiefly in the human resources and personnel departments, and were receiving better salaries, but even in these positions they were unlikely to be consulted on the company and industry's future. The Gramscian concept of factory councils imposing not only limitations on capitalists but of becoming "...the organs of proletarian power which would replace capitalism in all its useful functions of administration and leadership..."[55] was far from realisation. In essence management had created teams of more satisfied workers who were now under greater pressure to produce more and produce it faster. Management was still firmly in control of productivity rates and hence how hard workers laboured in the factory. In addition, the instability of the South African economy and the competitive nature of the industry left workers highly vulnerable to redundancies in an economy where few other jobs were available.

In 1991 the union had negotiated a 'model' agreement to reduce auto workers vulnerability to redundancies. This had however soon posed problems for members. The moratorium on retrenchments put new pressures on management to compensate for its inability to deal with falling profits through retrenchment. Hartford noted that raising levels of worker productivity in order to compete on global markets was employers' response, "The industry itself is under pressure. Now that it is regulated by our agreements on retrenchments, we've experienced attempts by management in different ways to speed up, and change the production process. They are trying to recover the same profitability that they would have had without the agreement."[56] The union and employers however conflicted on what should facilitate 'raising production levels'. Whilst employers believed raised production was the result of the increase in productivity of their workforce, the union, identified inefficiencies in other areas of production as a key restraint on higher productivity. As Hartford expressed it, "There are many factors - technology, breakdowns, management efficiency. Workers would be crazy to commit themselves to targets while they have no control of these factors."[57] Two disputes at Nissan in 1991 and Volkswagen in 1992 over the issue of production schedules brought the issue of productivity into sharp relief.

In 1991 Volkswagen management introduced new production targets in the press shop after conducting a time-and-motion study. The company revised the schedule from 160 A2 floor panels per hour to 211 A2 floor panels per hour. Workers complained that it was impossible to reach the new targets, and the union offered to do its own time study, and then to negotiate. The company refused. Volkswagen claimed that failure to reach the new targets was tantamount to unprocedural action, and it threatened to withdraw the moratorium on retrenchments and to dismiss any workers who refused to meet the new targets. The following year, in February 1992, the company dismissed 39 workers. The union responded by balloting 8 000 workers on strike action. This forced the company to negotiate, and after a number of stoppages it agreed to reinstate the workers. It also agreed to call in the National Productivity Institute to conduct a time-and-motion study, and to set schedules by which both the company and the union could abide. The agreement noted that the company was upgrading facilities in the press shop and that it would consult with the union on new production schedules and on any other changes to shift systems.[58] This was the first time in the auto industry that a union had won the right to negotiate an employer's production schedule. Discussions with the company also resulted in it agreeing to the possibility of placing shop stewards in a three year industrial engineers programme which, in Hartford's words, would mean having "... industrial engineers in our shop steward committee, accountable to us, who would be able to check schedules, work organisation, shifts and other things."[59]

In the same year a dispute also occurred at Nissan concerning production schedules. Initially the company began to increase the speed of the production line. Thereafter it circulated a memo to workers in the mechanical area outlining production schedules linked to different wage rates according to different levels of productivity. Workers complained, and Nissan, in similar manner to Volkswagen, claimed that workers were conducting an unprocedural go-slow which may result in retrenchment. Thereafter the company reduced workers` wages when they did not meet their targets. When a department only reached 60 per cent of production targets, management accordingly paid out only 60 per cent of wages.[60]

Accompanying this dispute a further struggle concerning `green areas` was being waged. 'Green areas' were a Japanese management technique to increase productivity by engaging the workforce in solving productivity issues. Workers and foremen in each section of production would meet for ten minutes each morning in a 'green area' before the day's work commenced. They discussed such issues as the previous day's production, and attempted to solve problems in a co-operative and consultative manner. Nissan however abused the spirit of this worker/ management consultative forum to bypass the union and the company's shopstewards in order to introduce a new set of disciplinary rules. The new rules included pay deductions for lost production. Workers responded by boycotting the 'green areas' and moved directly to the production lines, to start up

their machines. The company reacted by closing the plant for eight days during which time the union and management negotiated the dispute. Management rescinded its attempts to introduce 'green areas', acknowledged that suspicion of the technique now rendered 'green areas' unworkable. It also agreed to withdrew the new disciplinary rules and to negotiate the issue of production schedules and wages.[61]

At the heart of both these disputes was the question of consultation with the union over issues that fundamentally affected members' working lives. In these cases Numsa members were attacking the company's perceived prerogative to determine production schedules regardless of worker responses to these new pressures. The union viewed the resolution of these two disputes as a way forward on the issue of top-down management, claiming that, "The result of this is that we have challenged the right of management to unilaterally set and revise production schedules."[62]

The issue of productivity in the auto sector now came under scrutiny by the union. Internal research commissioned on the issue asserted that productivity was "at the heart of restructuring industry"[63]. It contended that productivity issues could not be contested at the workplace alone but were also linked to deeper structural problems in the industry. It concluded, "We have to ensure that Numsa does not get trapped into negotiating productivity at each plant and forget to focus primarily on industry level restructurings where the key productivity questions (market and producers) will be negotiated."[64] There was agreement by both labour and capital that the industry was in considerable difficulty as prices of vehicles rose sharply, and, following the removal of tariff protections under the international trade agreement, GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), it became exposed to global competitors who could sell their vehicles at a 30 per cent lower price on the South African market. It was agreed by all that the industry had to become more productive in order to become globally competitive and produce units more cheaply. Management's answer was wage restraint and a freeze on industrial action. Naamsa President, Bert Wessels, for example blamed low productivity on such factors as a 30 percent increase in real wages over the previous decade and a 30 per cent fall in annual worker output as a result of strike action, political unrest, and shorter working hours.[65] The union pointed out however that the labour component of the average vehicle was 15 per cent which left the balance of costs in capital and intermediate goods. Thus the smallest part of the input costs was being blamed for the evils of low productivity. It argued that there were structural problems in the industry itself that needed to be investigated. The plants of the seven manufacturers that operated in South Arica harboured heavily underutilised and often outdated machinery. They were also producing too many models compared with other countries which meant that volumes and component parts utilised were low.[66] The issue of market size and numbers of producers needed to be addressed which would entail rationalising the industry in a planned and co-ordinated manner. Other issues, the union contended, also needed to be addressed, including lack of management skill and incompetence, an

excess of supervisors and foreman coupled with low levels of responsibility for the average worker, the need for multi-skilling and training of workers, excessive remuneration of middle and higher levels of management, adversarial and hostile shop floor relations accompanied by unilateral restructuring and sidelining the union, and a low level of company resources allocated to research, all of which contributed to low productive levels.[67]

From 1993 the union engaged in the Motor Industry Task Force in an attempt to address many of the production issues in the industry. By 1995 the union had signed a productivity agreement with employers including guidelines for negotiating productivity, changes in work organisation, and a performance-based pay system. It stipulated that changes in productivity arrangements must ensure job security, and that changes in work organisation must be negotiated whilst the company should provide the union with relevant information to make informed decisions jointly. In 1992 it had adopted the position that productivity agreements should not be only a workplace concern but a nationally negotiated issue. Yet in its 1995 landmark agreement which seemed significantly to extend workers control over crucial productive issues, it was unable to reach agreement at industry level on guidelines for how work-teams should operate nor could it agree on guidelines for performance-based pay systems. This left unaddressed the important issue of how workers could wrest further control over their working lives.

In reality there was still enormous confusion at national level over how to restructure the workplace. At a National Bargaining Conference (NBC) in 1995 some delegates were of the opinion that the three year strategy of necessity entailed teamwork about which some were suspicious. "Why are we demanding a highly skilled, trained workforce, if we don't change the way we work?" asked one delegate.[68] Other delegates felt that teamwork was an employer tool and that the shopsteward`s role was to ensure that workers were not party to disciplining each other and that they were not overloaded with multi-tasking. Hartford expressed concern that work teams could "disorganise the union and collective bargaining by devolving all kinds of incentives and benefits to teams."[69] There was also evidence to show that post-Fordist teamwork did not necessarily improve productivity or retain jobs and that some Fordist-type production lines had better productivity records. Toyota, for example, ran its company in South Africa in a classic Fordist manner. It was not involved in co-determinist discussions with the union and did not encourage the creative participation of its workforce in increasing productive outputs. Yet the company was performing well, was a market leader, was not involved in retrenchments or outsourcing of non-core functions, and was one of the higher payers in the industry.[70] It appeared that there was no one strategy or model to follow even in the auto industry where factories produced similar items. Experience seemed to indicate the need for diverse approaches in maintaining and protecting reasonable jobs. Yet workers at Toyota had little hope of influencing important company decisions.

In 1996 Numsa organiser Dumisane Mbanjwa said this of the union,

> I would say today we are in a more powerful position than we were in the past. Our only weakness is the complex issues that we have to negotiate with employers. The range of issues around productivity, the question of competitiveness, has introduced a new spectrum of issues. In the past it was just a question of protest, and we never got involved in productivity issues. But now because of the new dispensation, we are seen as stakeholders, and yet we are newcomers in terms of understanding these complex issues.[71]

Broader issues of how workers needed to contribute to the economic restructuring of the country now came to bear on the workplace. Productivity issues were not just a question of workers pitting their wills against management pressures to produce more to enhance company profits. It was now a question of increasing the country's productive output to compete on world markets and to provide essential goods at affordable prices for ordinary people in the domestic economy. Managements had to work more efficiently, but so did workers. It was their joint responsibility to ensure that the ailing economy was turned around and began to thrive. The problem was how to ensure that workers did not take the brunt of new pressures and benefited from the new dispensation. The union negotiated framework agreements nationally to guide bargaining on such issues as productivity and attempted to incorporate safeguards for workers around job security but the detail still had to be negotiated at factory level. Workers now had to contend with complex issues such as multi-tasking, multi-skilling, degrees of technological innovation, and measurement of cycle times with no pointers as to what benefits or dangers such innovations held for them.

Often the expansion of workers' skills entailed an employer shift to multi-tasking. While this averted some of the alienation from, and tedium of, workers' former monotonous positions, it also held dangers. Hartford believed it gave employers too much flexibility,

> In the old days you'd say `If I'm a sprayer and you want me to clean my gun that's a maintenance job, not my job, quality control, not my job - that tradition. Then we came with multi-skilling, and it created demarcation disputes that you can't believe in the car plants all the time. I was managing dispute after dispute as workers said `that's not my job`, or `I'll do it if you pay me more.` In a car plant there are just thousands of tasks to build a car...
>
> Fordism says this is your job description, and you only do that. Now we said you can do anything, and the bosses can tell you to do anything. The control the union had of the workplaces was handed over to the bosses, hence the need for guidelines and regulation and control, and we lost that in the process.[72]

In general Hartford believed that the union had not prepared workers for what the three year programme entailed in practice. The critical consideration for him was that the work load would inevitably increase, "... the bottom line is where's it going on the shopfloor in terms of quality of working life? And its going to get harder and harder. Chris Lloyd knew what this was about. He'd say `absolutely, this means harder work'. So there was a level of knowledge although we didn't

know the details. Everyone talks about the good news not the bad news."[73] Numsa national office bearer, Omar Gire, expressed a similar unease when he observed, "What makes me worry most is the employers like this thing more than the union."[74] Hartford gave a graphic example of what Numsa's new policies meant for workers on the factory floor,

> Auto workers were also finding that management was only interested in one thing - the cycle time of an employee. How many tasks, in what time. Time was money. This was how management saw productivity. Japanese factories had shortened and shortened the cycle time. A cycle time was, for example, fitting the rubber on the door, and the door handle window, and then measuring how long this took. Management took a stopwatch, timed the activity and then set standards for the task.
>
> What this meant for members was: faster, harder work with more flexibility. It doesn't mean more control of work organisation. The control factor was not the level of skill but the cycle time. Try and negotiate that! That's one issue I never succeeded in. I achieved it in one plant - the right to agree the cycle time.[75]

It was clear that the struggle for workers' control was far from over. Numsa's new policies entailed a vigilance far exceeding the monitoring of a simple recognition agreement. Workers would have, for example, to mobilise around the right to negotiate the line speed, cycle times, and manning levels. Productivity disputes at Volkswagen and Nissan in 1991 and 1992 had shown that workers on the shopfloor could challenge productivity schedules, but as Hartford indicated this was an area in which management were reluctant to engage in negotiations which inevitably meant strikes and disputes. As global competition increased as protective tariffs declined so the pressures to produce more at a faster rate, would increase. A shopsteward on a tour of car plants in Australia and Europe turned to Chris Lloyd and said, "Look Chris I don't mind what you say, what money you pay us, we'd never work this hard."[76] Lloyd was critical of what he saw as the low productivity levels of South African metal workers. For him, better conditions accompanied the terrain of harder work. Gramsci had envisaged a working life that allowed workers to control the productive process and to express criticism, suggestions and improvements to speed up production which would simultaneously ease the burden of labour.[77] This was also Numsa's vision. In the shopsteward's comment to Lloyd was embedded a critique which in essence questioned at what point the pressures of capitalist competition ended, and at what point human labour could simply not work any faster without severely compromising the quality of its working life.

4. Negotiating change in engineering

Introduction

The new three year strategy in engineering was markedly different from the bargaining strategies built during the period of resistance to apartheid in the 1980s. It was a strategy for re-shaping industry and ushering in workplace change. It involved complex interlinked processes. It required a new organisational culture and new organisational forms and involved expert knowledge of the industry and the building of a more co-operative relationship with employers. Progress in auto was

made through the 1995 agreement, but in engineering the strategy began to unravel. Workplaces in the auto industry were structured in a similar manner to each other and embraced only 25 000 members making it easier to forge a consensus. The engineering industry by contrast encompassed 150 000 members who were engaged in vastly different types of work and establishments.

In engineering a messy complexity of problems and issues emerged. As will be explored below the union was suddenly confronted with questions of how to sustain high levels of workers' control in an environment which was not conducive to the slow, incremental workings that internal union democracy required. A host of organisational matters contributed to the undermining of this democracy and in circular fashion led to further organisational problems. In addition the union's failure to communicate the ideas that emerged from the Research and Development Groups in the early 1990s on which much of the three year bargaining programme was based now came back to haunt it. Workers reacted variously to the new strategy. Some responded initially with energy and enthusiasm but this seldom continued; others reacted with hostility, apathy, and deliberate or real ignorance of the issues involved. This ambivalence obstructed the union's capacity to implement.

On almost every level Numsa was suddenly besieged by critical issues. It was a dangerous time for workers and for the union. Would it be able to harness genuine power for its constituency, or would history record a weak and inadequate response at a critical time? Numsa was confronted by intense ideological, political, organisational, and bargaining complexities. A leadership crisis, problems of communication with its base, weak union structures, uneven educational provision, capacity, time and implementation problems, poor co-ordination, and the complexity of bargaining issues all plagued the union. Most serious of all however was the loss of a homogenous vision which resulted in a serious confusion on how to implement union policy at factory floor level. This was not helped by a general reluctance on the part of engineering employers seriously to engage with the union over problems in the industry. Thus the union's embattled vision endorsed by its CC was made even more tenuous by employers reluctant to engage with its central tenets.

Weaknesses in organisation and leadership

In the early 1990s, as recorded above, the union confronted huge changes on almost every level. Many of these changes were common to the union as a whole, but it was in the engineering sector which was the largest, and where the greatest expectations of effectively wielding power were located, that complexities and contradictions were most sharply expressed. Numerical growth in the auto and motor sectors had remained relatively constant. It was in engineering that the union had experienced it most rapid expansion, and this contributed to the complexity of the sector's organisational and bargaining approaches. Lloyd believed the union did not fully acknowledge important differences between the engineering and auto sectors and was in consequence neglectful of a huge proportion of its membership. This, in his opinion, weakened the union's ability to

implement its new strategy. As he saw it,

> It seems strange to me that you go to a policy workshop on bargaining and less than 20 000 auto workers dominate, and 150 000 engineering workers, the bulk of our membership, hardly get a say.
>
> We overplay the importance of the auto industry. I remember the auto agreement in 1995 got pages of news coverage, and yet it only covers 25 000 members. And yet the engineering agreement that was signed in 1996, which covers 250 000 people, I don't remember a column of news. That reflects a real bias in the union, employers and government against this industry. I don't believe our auto industry is any more complex than anywhere else in the world. It's not an industry that employs that many people. It assembles things by using a lot of machinery. I've been in plants in Germany and Italy where the total South African production is assembled in one plant using 5 000 people.
>
> We've allowed the union to think that the auto industry is of equal weight with the engineering industry, where our real potential to grow is. If we're going to export anything from South Africa, it's not built-up cars. It's components, tooling, equipment, parts.[78]

When the union first introduced the idea of a three year bargaining programme in 1993 on the Nicisemi, employers were not willing to engage. A Collective Bargaining Assessment recorded, "In the Engineering Sector, Seifsa stated that employers were sceptical and cynical to Numsa's new approach and only saw it as a new way to get more money for its members."[79] Slowly however elements of the bargaining programme were embraced particularly by larger companies on the Industrial Council through engagement in Industrial Council sub-committees. In 1993, 1994 and 1995 negotiations took place and an agreement was eventually realised on the adoption of five skills-based grades to replace the 13 task-based grades which had included over 300 classifications. There was an initial agreement in a 1993 sub-committee to consider the reduction of grades to nine which would be further reduced to five by 1996.[80] Employers however insisted that although they agreed in principle to broadbanding this should not be implemented at Industrial Council level but that the narrowing of differentials between grades should occur at plant level. By 1995 there was agreement that the compression of grades was to be on a voluntary basis, as Industrial Council minutes reflect, "…the sub-Committee charged with the task of converting jobs described and remunerated in our current agreement into a five grade structure is expected to complete the task by the end of October [1995]. Firms will thereafter on a voluntary basis but with a large degree of support and encouragement from the Council and it's [sic] parties, be able to restructure their labour complement to the advantage of all concerned."[81] There was also agreement on restructuring the industry training board, and adopting the modular training system. This entailed laying down standards for 22 sub-sectors in the industry. Finally agreement was reached on a productivity framework to guide plant negotiations in this area.[82]

Besides the union's inability to persuade the Council to enforce the 5 grade system, other pivotal elements of its bargaining strategy were missing. Employers refused to agree to the indexing of non-artisan rates to the artisan rate although there was agreement in 1995 on higher percentage

increases for lower-grade workers. In 1994 the artisan rate was R20. Thus for Numsa to win 10 per cent differentials between grades it would have to raise the minimum wage in the lowest grade from R6.02 per hour to R12 in order to equal 60 per cent of the artisan rate. This was an increase of around 100 percent which demonstrated the huge task that lay ahead of the union. The same year the union won a 9,5 per cent across the board increase on actual wages.[83] Thus it won neither an inflation linked increase, (food inflation had risen by 11,5 per cent) nor an improvement factor over and above inflation, nor the linking of all wages to the artisan rate with 10 percent differentials between grades. There was also no agreement on paid training leave, or on the RPL principle. Smith commented, "We couldn't tie them into the complete thing. It was a very, very complicated process."[84] The net result was that membership experienced few concrete benefits at the end of negotiations.

During the 1994 round of bargaining, loud complaints from Numsa's regions concerning the pace and nature of negotiations were voiced. Osborne Galeni, a Wits East regional organiser recalls, "There was a constant howling on the ground, that this thing belongs to head office. Even the proponents of the programme began to realise that they were talking to the bosses while the members were not on board."[85] An Eastern Cape women worker gave the following response to the new bargaining programme,

> Before, every worker used to participate whether you are educated or not and you were listened to. Now there's a dictatorship of these intellectual people that dominate meetings, and use big terms of words, and the illiterate have moved into the background.
>
> With the old type of workers` control there was a basic understanding from workers that they are fighting for a living wage, or against discrimination. Common issues and understandings, that ` I'm a worker, I have to control, and I'm not going to allow capitalism to rule my life`... The three year strategy started and workers were confused `What is this fucking business, there's a dictatorship from whites and workers didn't understand what was happening on top. It moved from workers` control to national decisions on top. Bureaucratic unionism with no proper discussion on the factory floor.[86]

The union abruptly awoke to such sentiments when Wits East and Central regions in 1994 reverted to Numsa's former style of negotiations by proposing strike action over the employers' low wage offer. This was followed by a metal plant stayaway in the regions, and a march of thousands of workers to Seifsa's Johannesburg offices. The union rapidly organised regional and national workshops to inform members of bargaining progress and regional congresses and a National Bargaining Conference were called to discuss problems. Galeni recalls conducting endless seminars and workshops thereafter in his region to educate members on the programme. Finally, however he had to ask himself, "... does this belong to the people if I have to keep explaining it to them?"[87]

Smith believed that the union was aware of the need to educate and communicate thoroughly around the bargaining programme but that not enough time was given to this. Ginsberg in his study

of trade union education in the 1980s and 1990s notes how systematic shopstewards' leadership and education training in Numsa in the early 1990s was neglected in favour of the RDGs and policy formulation forums. Membership education almost entirely disappeared. This was exacerbated in the months preceding the 1994 democratic elections when Numsa education was mobilised almost solely around winning the worker vote for the ANC. He also notes that the power of white intellectuals, whose influence had declined after the formation of Cosatu in 1985, re-emerged in Cosatu affiliates in the period of political transition. They became important conduits for changing political and economic trends in the union.[88] Union leadership recognised this educational neglect and were also aware of how much energy and time needed to go into an education process when attempting to shift worker attitudes and traditional practices. This knowledge notwithstanding, leadership pursued the programme believing that time was simply not available. Smith recalls the obstacles from the leadership's point of view,

> There was a genuine attempt to get it through to membership after it was imposed. We had discussions around the need for consultation. Very long consultation around the strategy was so critical. I had some sense of that, because of my experience in negotiations, just trying to convince people to accept a particular deal. That you really had to spend most of your time, not in the negotiations, but talking to your constituency. But I think there was a view that we were faced with a window of opportunity which you were going to lose. So in a sense the strategy was put on the table with no real backing. It was the Central Committee who was backing, so therefore we're going to sell it. The problem was that very few people actually understood the strategy.[89]

Organisational weaknesses within the union further exacerbated its communication problems with membership. Links between the national negotiating team and the leadership in regions and in factories weakened. Union report-back structures in the 1990s progressively attenuated. The first structure to disappear in 1992 was the National Organising and Campaigns Committee (Nocc). The Nocc had consisted of representatives from each National Industry Council bargaining committee as well as representatives from each region in each sector. Before national negotiations a Nocc would convene following an head office memo on bargaining issues for discussion in regions. The Nocc ensured bargaining continuity between bargaining conferences by liaising with Regional Shop Stewards Councils. This allowed the union to assess the progress of negotiations, and to attend to education, communication and other organisational matters. East Rand organiser, Elias Monage, who sat on the Nocc, attributed its disappearance to various factors. He believed that `power play among senior leadership of the union` who were not involved in bargaining, was partly responsible. "People [senior leadership] felt that it was a power base of certain individuals, for example, Bernie [Fanaroff] was head of bargaining. He established Nocc."[90] Some in the national leadership were concerned that their power would be undermined through Nocc's alternative power base. Such leadership contended that the Nocc reinforced divisions that existed as a result of the different unions which had merged and brought different sectors into Numsa. The Nocc encouraged National Industry Councils to conduct campaigns in each sector and they thus viewed its activities as divisive. Monage believed this was a false logic as ultimately the Nocc

aimed to develop united campaigns by `strategising across all sectors`.[91] The Nocc was a campaign committee rather than a formally constituted union structure and it was thus easy to sideline and phase out. Following its demise, campaign media such as pamphlets and posters ceased to be produced, and rallies and factory general meetings on the progress in negotiations were no longer organised. The other important structure that was discontinued in 1992 was the Transvaal Chairpersons Forum. The Forum consisted of chairpersons of every factory committee in the Transvaal and was again not a constitutional structure. This was the Forum that in the 1980s had waited eagerly in a hall adjacent to negotiations so that the industrial council negotiating team could obtain mandates and shopstewards were rapidly able to mobilise industrial action if necessary. According to Monage it was a useful structure as it enabled direct input into negotiations from the factory floor and ensured a high level of workers' control over the negotiating process. Certain leadership at both national and regional levels had reservations about the structure however. Some senior leaders disliked its militancy, for example when it mobilised demonstrations against the slow progress of negotiations, whilst regional leadership in areas outside the Transvaal complained that the Transvaal was too powerful and other regions were excluded from participation. In Monage's view the Transvaal Chairpersons Forum was justified as 80 per cent of the engineering industry was located in the Transvaal and those who opposed it `weren't addressing the historical thing. It was one of the things that Numsa inherited from Mawu.`[92] A critical factor too was that the Nicisemi negotiations were moved from Germiston on the East Rand where much of the metal industry was located to Randburg. According to Monage `it was difficult for chairpersons to assemble in a right-wing area and far away… By moving that meeting from Germiston it had an impact on our members. No more demonstrations in our region... Even if you went back to your respective locals you could discuss with other shopstewards. All those things were no longer there."[93] Monage believed the disbandoning of these structures was a blow for workers' control as it disempowered and distanced membership from negotiations. "The manner in which we got rid of structures was uncalled for. By doing that we were also dumping that militancy and mobilisation aspect of any campaign… [previously] shopstewards were demonstrating in their own factory that this is their own struggle."[94]

The NBC now met without the bargaining continuity and communication with regions between conferences which made it difficult to raise problems and complaints on a regular basis. Written communiqués from head office to the regions were not effective, and regular meetings between the general secretary and regional secretaries did not occur.[95] The consequence was that over time members felt they lost control of negotiations. A union organiser from Eastern Cape commented,

> Report-backs on how you fared in the process of negotiations, the problems, did we achieve some of our demands, which victories did we make? That no longer happens... And from then on they [membership] felt out of control, and the power to influence wages had gone. Negotiations in the past were always informed by the militancy of the shopfloor. Now it's highly sophisticated, and the centralised process is far removed from them. `The three year strategy doesn't change our lives' workers say.[96]

During the 1993-4 period the union failed to co-ordinate any bargaining campaigns or to convene National Bargaining Conferences. A further problem was that the union negotiated with employers to set up specialist Nicisemi working groups to deal with different parts of the three year strategy. Regions felt that issues got buried in these groups. Galeni remembers, "There was no movement. Issues were always referred back to working groups. There was nowhere where you could say we have reached deadlock. You did not know when to fight and when not."[97] Negotiations in these working groups were highly technical and prolonged. In auto there was an agreement, but it was taking time to implement. In engineering it was more complex because of different processes and sizes of companies. It was taking time to persuade employers to agree to the programme. It was clear members would see no immediate benefits.

The failure to co-ordinate national campaigns or bargaining conferences in this period was exacerbated by communication blockages between union departments. In the early 1990s inherited problems from the time of Numsa's merger also emerged to haunt the union. One of the problems was the separation between the collective bargaining, organising, and education departments each with its own national secretary. This structure had originally been created to accommodate powerful leaders from different unions. Co-operation between departments was shaky and relations were often competitive. Hartford believed it was 'artificial' to separate these departments.[98] Les Kettledas was the collective bargaining secretary, Bernie Fanaroff the organising secretary, and Alec Erwin the education secretary. A report to the NEC in 1990, for example, complained that , "There is still no adequate co-ordination between the Organising Department and the Education Department on inclusion of organisational issues in education programmes."[99] Lloyd was highly critical of the lack of connectedness of these structures to organisers and educators in the field. In his view each one was a private 'fiefdom' where the control of bargaining was held in tight rein by the national secretary,

> I could not understand how you can collectively bargain with the sort of executive group which were not connected to organisers. The three, four national secretary processes it seemed to me were just a group of armed camps. Alec's little education fiefdom which frankly was being used more for the promotion of broader political interests - tripartite forums and so on. Bargaining was a sort of a group of sort of jet about bargainers. And that was all we were, with Les holding some control on the reins.[100]

Preparation for national collective bargaining also suffered. A report from a May 1993 Negotiating Committee Caucus revealed that the bargaining preparation schedule had defaulted in many regions. In Wits East, Wits West, Highveld, Northern Cape, Border and Northern Natal none of the planned workshops for shopstewards transpired. In other regions (with the exception of the Western Cape) there were no workshops held at all, or workshops were held for organisers, RECs, or for isolated local office bearers. The report ended by lamenting that "... there are serious weaknesses in the preparation phase for the Bargaining Programme and we again run the risk of

bargaining taking place ahead of the understanding of the leadership and membership and will lead to difficulty in the reporting back and mandating processes in the structures."[101]

Severe capacity problems were also emerging. Numsa's engagement with numerous tripartite forums substantially increased the union's workload. Thus leadership and staff who most clearly understood the union's new strategy, were frequently not involved in bargaining. Smith recalls,

> Bernie was getting a lot more involved with policy stuff. Sitting on the Eskom electricity council, getting involved in the Science and Technology initiative. All that kind of policy stuff, and then there was just all this organisational shit that had to be coped with. Alec was very busy politically outside - major transformations were happening. I think already people knew where they were going to go post elections, and started making plans.
>
> When I left, I was replaced by Velaphi Mjiako. And he just had to catch up! Not even people in Head Office appreciated him. Bernie wasn't available as mentor because of all these other things. Moss [Mayekiso - general secretary] wasn't paying attention to him at all! Chris [Lloyd] came in and was the only person. He acted as mentor... It was just chaos really. And that was the context in which we tried to insert a new vision, and a new strategy into the union.[102]

National organiser, Bobbie Marie, reflecting on the period believed that it could not have been different because of the coincidence of major political events taking place in the country at the time. Many of Numsa's initiatives, he believed, could not have come to fruition without engagement in national political policy forums. Here he observes,

> We were all tripping on projects that were very far from Numsa's needs because it was formative times, innovative times... and what Numsa needed was a lot of consolidative work because things were slipping. But the big guys were challenged by things to do with the industry and the country. And there was never a general secretary consolidating because Moss was never a GS, because when he came out of prison he went off into Sanco [South African National Civic Organisation]. And Adrienne [Bird] was off on the training issue for a long time. These things related to Numsa, they all spun off Numsa, but they never asked the question `for the engineering industry right now, how do we bring people to deal with it?`
>
> It was logical that if you followed the training and grading thing, there was no way you could solve it within Numsa. You had to have change in the policy of the education system... In the same way that Alec's [Erwin] Economic Trends thing started as debates in Numsa, and then logically you follow into an economic strategy for the country. But Numsa got crunched in the process.[103]

It should be said that the union, even in the Mawu days, had always operated with minimal resources in a crisis management mode. The difference now was that many more urgent issues confronted the union and the dedicated leadership of the Mawu, Naawu and early Numsa days was distracted and unfocussed. The union made attempts to halt the encroaching chaos. In 1992 Mare and Joe Foster, an education officer, drafted a plan which accommodated political changes occurring in South Africa, and which situated the union in this transition. In what became known as the three year organisational programme spanning 1992 - 1994, they set times and goals around restructuring the union. They assessed the union's needs in terms of leadership capacity, internal

educational needs, and organisational changes in order to build a union with a socialist vision. The plan built across departments whilst simultaneously allowing each department a degree of independence. Each national secretary had certain tasks to fulfil. As Mare explained, "What you wanted was a stricter division of labour because our tradition was for everyone doing everything, and then you wanted collective work at the different centres. So we had a national team, regional team, and local teams where people were working on different things but working together as a team."[104] The head of departments had to report back to the NEC or CEC on what they had or had not done. The plan laid out central objectives which included the building of 'a strong, democratic, militant and effective organisation'. This was to be combined with the restructuring of industry and the strengthening of Cosatu and other working class formations in order to intervene effectively on national political and economic issues in the interests of workers. The central objectives were elaborated upon in a description of broad objectives and tasks for Numsa's Departments, namely those of the general secretary, administration, organising, education and training, and Collective Bargaining. In turn each department had to set specific objectives. For example, the collective bargaining department had to develop a programme to guide the union's industrial restructuring negotiations, and improve and consolidate its bargaining structures. Finally the plan detailed how communication between departments would take place. This was laid out in a document entitled "Integration of Department Tasks" and included the integration of regional structures and regional organisers in the national schema.[105]

This overly bureaucratised plan never ran its course. The old national leadership was leaving the union, and new layers of leadership took their place. In Erwin's words, "It was too sophisticated at that point. It was difficult for the second layer of leadership to pick it up and run with it."[106] The new leadership headed by general secretary, Enoch Godongwana, was neither familiar with the background to the ideas, nor fully understood its logic, and there was no induction into the programme. Commented Mare, " ... you get a huge gap, and you get a new set of guys who are slowly whittling away this agenda by default."[107] At the end of 1993 the CEC abandoned the programme and with it went Joe Foster who was the programme co-ordinator. Thereafter attempts at long term planning within the union ceased.

Between 1993 and 1995 Numsa lost a substantial number of its experienced leadership at every level of the union. Many pivotal unionists moved into positions in the post-apartheid government, or into institutions drafting policies to guide future legislation in the new South Africa. Mare commented, "The country was moving at such a pace and for Numsa's key intellectuals and leaders to simply focus in on having a well run organisation, meant they would not have been the key people they were. They were the cream of the country, and the fact that it's unnatural to have so many powerful people in the same place, and somewhere they were all feeling that. They were also all tired, burnt out."[108] In addition, many senior shopstewards who had long been frustrated

by the lack of mobility in their companies started to enter management structures, frequently into human resources and personnel departments. Von Holdt, for example, records the change in culture and the demoralising effect it had on the shopstewards committee at Highveld Steel. From 1994 onwards senior shopstewards were making plans to pursue careers outside the union where options ranged from "town councillor, civil servant, or MPL [Member of Provincial Legislature] in the Mpumalanga legislature, to manager in the local training and development initiatives or businessman; inside the company there were opportunities for promotion to foreman, industrial relations or safety officers, or even a managerial position."[109] In the auto sector for example, the union was confronted in the second week of the 1994 strike by a new employer negotiator from Mercedes Benz who was flanked by two black managers, both former Numsa shopstewards.[110]

This exodus inevitably took valuable trained leadership out of the union but more specifically it removed a number of leaders who most clearly comprehended Numsa's policy shifts - Bird, Fanaroff, Erwin, Schreiner, Smith, Mayekiso, Gomomo, Kettledas, and Hartford to name a few. Their exodus opened a policy vacuum in the union. The new leadership was no longer unified by a single political and bargaining goal. Lloyd saw this lack of unified vision producing three distinct groups. One faction still held out for a transitional stage to armed struggle and a socialist victory which rejected the union's new policy direction. A second still employed the jargon of resistance and struggle, but distanced itself from the workplace difficulties with which shopstewards were confronted. Lloyd viewed this group thus, "That group's sabotage is more effective because when shopstewards are confronted with a thick restructuring document from the employers, written by an American consultant, the local organiser says `don't touch it, just reject it`. The members reject it, and find that doesn't work. Then the organiser fails to turn up during employer discussions, and goes to the regional office who says this is a compromise with capital."[111] The final group, according to Lloyd, was the `huge wage demand` group who "...go in and demand a 20 per cent wage rise. If you study the last five years of our settlements, we see that if it`s a recession we get 1 per cent below the inflation rate. If it`s an upturn in the economy we get 1 per cent above the inflation rate. We go in high, and the employers equally stupidly go in low - say 6 per cent - and then we have this ridiculous positional bargaining where it takes three months. This means all the more complex things in negotiations are wiped off the table."[112]

The latter group demonstrated no real understanding of why the union needed to reduce wage differentials between different levels of skill. Many of them saw the strategy for reducing the apartheid wage gap as a peripheral issue and their influence frequently resulted in the union demanding an across the board increase at all levels. This lack of integration of Numsa's new bargaining policies meant that few had grasped, or wanted to grasp, the ideas underpinning the strategy. It was not understood as a way of dealing with the crisis in the manufacturing sector and as a way of saving what was left of Numsa's industries. Those who promoted the policies believed that the union urgently needed to obtain agreement with government on the rate of tariff

reductions, and agreement with employers on how they were going to restructure their companies accordingly. Lloyd gave this example of an opportunity the union missed, "Barlow [Barlow Rand] is a classic example. They're just clearly winding down their whole operation, and they're now going to amalgamate with KRC and Defy just to have a small operation. The irony is that the market for washing machines and fridges in South Africa is three times the world`s growth rate. We should be making mountains of these."[113] Much of the leadership did not grasp the integrated strategy that union policy was attempting to promote, or did not have the knowledge of how to negotiate such a complex range of issues. Thus it tended to negotiate the policy as a series of isolated activities such as grading reduction, training or recognition of prior learning.

The ambivalence and lack of understanding of the policies inevitably resulted in a weak commitment by leadership to the new strategy. Smith comments, "I don't think that the people in education were committed to their strategy. They would criticise it more than really try to have an objective discussion around it."[114] The lack of leadership commitment to the policies meant that organisers did not feel strong and confident about what they were doing. They started to become defensive. Numsa's strength and heritage had been one of open debate. Now ironically, as its National Publications Officer Jenny Grice, observed, "In a situation where there were not many people with skills it was important to be open and get a free flowing of ideas."[115], necessary debate declined.

It was often only in retrospect that such reflection and debate took place. Monage later commented, "We needed to evaluate it. When we moved away from the rands and cents and percentage increase combination, we didn't evaluate it properly. It was a rush-rush arrangement. We should have evaluated and assessed. What problems, how far are we and so on. In the old structures there was massive assessment of problems encountered, so we could build the next year."[116] Before Lloyd left Numsa in 1996, he expressed the view that the union should have addressed certain union official's attitude problems and assessed them in the light of trade unionism elsewhere,

> The work rate of the average trade union official in South Africa is not high. It's much lower than trade union officials in Australia. A lot of people use trade unionism as a political stage post to go to other places. That's a problem, because at the moment we have to work much harder than we ever worked as trade union officials to implement agreements. We pay ourselves too much already. We're paid five times what a policeman is paid in the first five years for a dangerous job. If you pay like this, there must be some link between pay and performance in the job, particularly when the money comes out of your members' pockets.[117]

Amongst officials at national level who more fully understood the bargaining strategy such as Mare, Foster, Smith, and Lloyd there was concurrence that not only membership education on the strategy was lacking but the absence of comprehensive internal training of officials was a serious oversight. Smith observed, "We needed to have educators who understood what they were talking about. There were very few people who understood what was happening in the industry, who can

debate through basic economics, who understand global situations... You need efficient administrative systems, and education and research departments as a resource. And we didn't have those kinds of things."[118]

Inevitably such organisational weaknesses made an impression on bargaining in all sectors of the union. It was apparent in the neglect of the motor sector but here the struggle to narrow the gap between the pay and skills of the lowest and highest paid workers had only just begun. Rebuilding the strength of the Nicmi was a priority. In the union's largest engineering sector however these organisational weaknesses had their greatest impact. The union had acquired significant power on the Nicisemi and was poised to make a genuine attempt to implement its new bargaining programme but internal weaknesses severely restricted its ability to pursue this path in a convincing manner. Furthermore, unlike the auto sector, it was confronted by a diversity of sub-sectors that mitigated against the cohesive strategy that it was able to adopt in the government backed tripartite Motor Task Team. Government intervention in this case assured the participation of all major auto stakeholders. By contrast, in engineering, the union would be plagued by the employers inability to act in the sector's common interest. In addition the diversity of the sector made it difficult for any coherent intervention by government except on a sector by sector basis. Without the resources and economic will of the state in engaging this sector, most engineering employers showed little inclination to co-operate with the union's restructuring agenda. An exploration below of employer responses and various workplace initiatives in this period highlights some of the difficulties the union faced in implementing its programme. This account is not comprehensive in any manner and provides an overview rather than in-depth workplace studies. Nevertheless it provides some indication of what the union was grappling with and why it did not succeed in implementing its new bargaining policies in this sector.

Democratising the workplace

Thus far limitations on the implementation of Numsa's three year bargaining programme have been assessed from a national perspective. Ultimately though the union's ability to implement the programme at the workplace level would be its most important test. This section attempts to draw out certain trends that emerged in this period with regard to the implementation of policies on the factory floor. It is beyond the scope of this study to attempt an in-depth investigation of Numsa's companies as each company would constitute a study in itself. In consequence this investigation draws on a number of articles and studies of the time which, although scarce, throw light on the progress of the union's bargaining policies. The analysis also draws on a number of personal interviews where organisers and senior shopstewards discussed the union's successes and failures.

Many of the problems that were manifesting themselves at a national and regional level were also apparent in the workplace. Numsa aimed to reconstruct the workplace through the enhancement of

workers' skills which would be linked to grading and pay structures. Most critically it aimed to extend workers' control of production through a more co-operative and shared management of the workplace. Firstly, this would occur through the replacement of a hierarchical supervisory model to flatter, more democratic team-based formations. Secondly, it would be enacted through cooperative negotiations with management with a view, in the union's words, to promote 'intelligent production'.[119] The aim of such negotiations would be to restructure and democratise the workplace through the discussion of such issues as profit distribution, investment decisions, technological change, job creation and retention, and productive output. Framework agreements negotiated at a national level would provide the basis for restructuring the factory floor in a manner that would enhance workers' control. Control issues would take precedence over money issues but would ultimately ensure increased wealth for workers. "We have to accept that IC negotiations will be less important than in the 1980s when the struggle was about rectifying inequalities, and closing the wage gap. Now flexibility is essential."[120] commented Schreiner. Shopstewards were encouraged to abandon hardened adversarial attitudes and to demonstrate a new flexibility and innovative ways of attaining control and generating wealth for members.

Workplace change was a central tenet of the three year bargaining programme but it was in this arena that the programme went most seriously awry. The union confronted what Crouch views as a central contradiction in trade unions' attempts to build power, "The effect of unions becoming involved in national economic questions is to shift their proceedings away from issues that individual workers and shopfloor organisation is interested in. Participation becomes limited to national level and may be against the interests or at the expense of the local level. It is more likely to satisfy participation (control) goals than money gains and any money gains will be at the controllable centralised national level. The members do not share in the union's interest in participation and are likely to resist agreements for wage restraint..."[121] Numsa membership on the whole was still narrowly focussed on 'money gains'. Only a small number of senior shopstewards were attempting to advance the union's control in the workplace and in the industry. Many members had no knowledge of the union's participation in a range of forums where it hoped to advance its members interests more generally in the new democracy. The need to ensure that the union be engaged in a struggle to keep workers' interests on the agenda after the transition to a new democracy, was not an issue that members necessarily grasped or were aware of.

Yet, in many ways the union's structure and its emphasis on the participation of the factory floor was well suited to the devolution of such questions to the shopfloor. It had always been the union's aim to acquire greater control at the point of production. Numsa however was confronted with the difficult issue of how to assist over 5 000 workplaces in engineering in respect of issues fraught with dangers for workers. There was the danger, for example, that in expanding workers' skills through training such multi-skilling might further reduce jobs. Ehrenreich's response to such fears was that "those are political questions where we need to put in place safeguards."[122] But, the

question was, where to locate such safeguards? If negotiated at a national level, a clear understanding of the dangers for workers was needed at a factory level in order to negotiate the implementation of such safeguards. As has already been discussed, not even senior leadership was sure of what dangers lay ahead. Thus such safeguards were in many ways more appropriately negotiated at the workplace but this required experienced and sophisticated shopsteward committees which not all factories had developed.

A further problem the union was experiencing in implementing its programme was that many of the policies it wished to introduce were dependent on new government laws, regulations, policies and systems being put in place. This process was inevitably slow as it involved dismantling decades of apartheid practices. In consequence the union had little to show membership of the logic and beneficial effects of its new policies. In the area of education and training, for example, slow progress was made in setting national standards, and industry training boards lacked capacity. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) which was the body responsible for setting common standards for the whole country took much longer than expected to create. In engineering, despite some people urging the union to utilise private in-company training, Numsa waited on the establishment of SAQA. The union demonstrated a hesitancy and respect for bureaucratic procedures that it had dispensed with in its dealings with the former government. Previously it would have devised alternative means to reaching its goal. Problems were also manifesting on the Metal Industry Training Board because of the number of sub-sectors in the industry which embraced a wide range of skills and activities. The Board established a pilot project to develop training modules on production skills including for assembly, casting and moulding, electrical production, fabrication and forging. Inevitably it took time to develop modules and thus shopstewards were unable to implement on the shopfloor. The union had promised modules by 1996. By 1995 it was clear this was not possible.[123]

Union officials and shopstewards also struggled to come to grips with the new issues on the factory floor, “We are dealing with complicated issues. We don’t have the capacity as a union to deal with those issues at company level. It’s difficult for organisers as well as shopstewards.”[124] said Monage. In the area of team work, for example, there were no clear guidelines for shopstewards to follow and it was difficult for workers to know how to respond. They had to confront a range of questions such as whether they agreed with the notion of team work and if they should embrace it how should they construct such a team? Should they appoint team leaders, or should this be a rotating position? Should team leaders receive higher pay, and what about productivity bargaining? There were no national guidelines.

In defence of Numsa’s national bargaining team, it attempted to give support to shopstewards confronting the issue of restructuring in their sectors and companies. It conducted mini-conferences on restructuring issues and experiences in all its sectors and planned to hold these

twice a year. These mini-conferences included a focus on electrification and industrial computers, consumer durables and consumer and electronics, ferroalloys and iron and steel, and heavy engineering. It
also attempted to conduct pilot projects in companies in order to learn lessons and generate models for other companies but these were rejected by employers. The union, for example, requested a restructuring pilot project at Prestige where they believed they would get co-operation but in negotiations the company refused. It also commissioned research on various sectors from the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) to inform shopstewards in their restructuring tasks.[125]

Numsa also struggled with the weakening of its local level structures. A 1991 *Numsa Info* asked questions and made statements such as these, "Our offices: hostile and inefficient?"; "Why are women inactive?"; "Loyalty is built by solving problems".[126] A union report at the end of 1992 complained that shopsteward structures were weak in all auto plants except Nissan and that local and regional organisers in the Eastern Cape, Border, Southern Natal and Northern Transvaal had no programme to rebuild the organisation. It complained that, "Our organisation is weaker than ever before ... At the same time there is no clear definition of our separate and collective responsibilities resulting in duplication, and inadequate information flow from officials."[127] Discussion on its new policies and direction was often not possible because factory general meetings and local councils were not taking place. *Numsa Info* in 1994 reported some of members' complaints, such as: "Many shopstewards don't come to our Local Shop Steward Council anymore. They think now that we are free politically our problems are over. But the economic problems we have now are even more complicated than before", and "The organiser did not come to our meeting that we set with our boss" or a complaint from the administrator in a local office, "I don't know where the organiser is, he hasn't phoned."[128] There were many reasons for the decline in motivation at the local level but Lester has advanced the argument that union-wide programmes often increase the influence and authority of national headquarters and that this has a demoralising effect on local leadership. He believes this results in the reduction of power of shopstewards as locals become less independent centres of leadership and decision-making and become more administrative in nature.[129]

The lack of motivation, discipline and control at the local level was further exacerbated by the loss of many of its more experienced organisers and shopstewards to the national level. This meant that these people were no longer on the ground, where factories needed assistance and ideas. There was for example minimal guidance on understanding the national agreement and an agreement was nothing if it could not be effectively implemented. This meant that good national agreements were not being implemented at plant level. Said one Northern Transvaal organiser, "You can ask anyone in auto, the three year agreement, nobody wants it any more because you go back to the factory and Numsa and the employers interpret it differently. You still have to interpret again in companies and sometimes go to dispute to have certain issues implemented." Clauses within the national

agreements provided for the training of shopstewards, but as Grice pointed out, "Our mistake was we didn't provide training around the agreement. We built this complicated agreement and left it so shopstewards were left without knowing the details."[130] The complexity of the agreement's wording made shopstewards feel highly vulnerable in relation to management. They believed that the union needed to get `a neutral person` to put agreements into plain, simple English, "so we don't fight over words and we don't understand it, then the company can in interpret it in their own way."[131]

As has previously been mentioned initiatives to restructure the factory floor were met with varying responses by shopstewards, workers and employers. This meant that the integrated nature of the three year bargaining programme was lost. The union was aware of this danger early on and attempted to retain the programme's cohesive character. Les Kettledas made this appeal at 1993 Nicisemi negotiations, "Numsa's proposals constitute an integrated package and we want progress on all the issues, in all of the groups, as fast as we can…We don't want Working Group 2 to be considered the priority committee, the short term committee…and then we just disregard and treat the other two committees as being of lesser importance. We would caution very much against that, that we should see the whole process as an integrated process and that we should see progress in all of them."[132] The union however was waging a losing battle. It was soon no longer a programme but a set of individual bargaining demands. In the motor sector, as has been outlined, the bargaining programme was negotiated at a national industrial council level in just such a fragmented manner because of the underdeveloped and scattered nature of the sector. A similar scenario played out in many engineering concerns although the sector also incorporated a number of large and powerful companies where implementation of the strategy was more conceivable. Even here, however, there were only pockets of technological sophistication where opportunities for further training and promotion existed, and these pockets could exist within one company. At Scaw Metals which manufactured and cast steel products, for example, the foundry operations were labour intensive and few technological innovations had been introduced. In the rolling mills, or melt shops, technological advances which were essential to the process had been introduced gradually over the years. In the grinding media where ore was pulverised both labour intensive operations and the use of various kinds of technology existed side by side. Thus training and promotional opportunities varied greatly according to the product process. Highveld Steel, and Alusaf, exhibited similar pockets of highly developed operations combined with labour intensive zones. Columbus Steel and Dorbyl on the other hand had pursued the technological route and had almost completely eliminated unskilled migrant labour. Thus Numsa confronted a wide variety of operations which a single bargaining strategy, geared to the concept of new workplace organisation and technological innovation which allowed for training and upward mobility, could not possibly cover. Tony Kgobe, a national organiser, pointed out in 1997 that South Africa's workplaces still consisted of a comparatively homogenous group of people with roughly similar skills, and a small group of more skilled workers. This is what industry seemed to require and it rendered promotional

opportunities scarce.[133]

Even where opportunities did present themselves to implement the strategy and where experienced shopstewards, buoyed by political change were eager to implement workplace change, workers confronted negative employer attitudes. The union was plagued by the engineering industry's and individual employer's refusal to share relevant information or to consult with Numsa. Without such consultation restructuring attempts were doomed. Levy Mamobolo, a head shopsteward at Bosch, recalled that the company's biggest strike in 1993 was over this issue, "Bosch started restructuring and retrenching workers. There was no consultation. We went on strike for two months. There is no restructuring without consultation with the union now. And most of the retrenched have been re-employed."[134] For many employers attempts at increasing company efficiency meant seeking skilled workers from outside the firm. In this process the value of the resources already within the company were disregarded. In 1993 Samuel Mthethwa, a shopsteward at Alusaf spoke of the company's disrespect for their workforce, "The mine manager says `When are you going to advertise for new smelters with matric`. And I said we have old people that have served the company for 25 years and they can do all the work in this department. When are you going to promote?... My main work is to get management to recognise the skills that have been gained from working in the job... The culture in that company is rotten."[135] There was a deep chasm between Numsa and employers' conception of restructuring the workplace.

Many employers who witnessed the exodus of experienced Numsa leadership, the scarcity of union resources, and the organisational weaknesses that manifested, took the opportunity to reinstate the control they had lost in the late 1980s. In many cases this control involved a reversion to the former apartheid workplace regime. Von Holdt has recorded attempts by Highveld Steel management to reinstate its former authority and a similar trend emerged in Mercedes Benz.[136] The South African workplace was not reflecting the monumental changes that were taking place in the society at large. Bird commented in 1995 that most Numsa companies still "... reflected the structure of the apartheid state, the notion that workers needed to be policed and controlled."[137] Von Holdt in his study of Highveld Steel in the early 1990s records an authoritarian workplace characterised by a racial structure of power and racial division of labour. The union had won basic rights and a host of other victories such as a reduction in harassment, job reservation, and favouritism, improved relations with supervisors, safety measures and proper work breaks. Yet these rights were circumscribed. No provision was made for shoptewards to take time off for union training, no paid time off, no leave to hold shopstewards committee meetings during working hours, no rights to a union office with telephones on company premises, and no facilities provided for conducting union general meetings. Despite improved relations authoritarian supervision still prevailed and racial assaults and conflict persisted into the 1990s. Racial discrimination was embedded in the structure of the workplace. Black and white staff were recorded on separate pay rolls and a racial division of labour meant that 90 per cent of supervisors

and all line managers were white, whilst black artisan apprentices, although growing in numbers, were in the minority. Legislation requiring segregated facilities in workplaces had been repealed in the 1980s but, despite a company commitment to end segregation, it persisted. Frank Boshielo, a former Highveld shopsteward and later Numsa organiser, described racial discrimination in the 1990s,

> Facilities are still segregated. Wash facilities, canteens, medical services. The unions are still forcing management to reform, but each step is hard fought. Health and safety is still a battle - to get enough air extractors to reduce respiratory problems. Many workers live in overcrowded, single sex rooms. Management never sees fit to build black workers houses. It costs money to make things more safe. Hostels are even worse than in 1985 - pipes leaking, toilets broken.[138]

For workers a negotiated political settlement and a new democracy implied workplace changes and expectations were raised accordingly. For management however it was work as usual.

If such conditions persisted in Highveld Steel where Numsa had long organised and which was one of the biggest and richest companies in South Africa owned by its largest conglomerate, Anglo America, it is certain that workers in smaller establishments in the engineering and motor industries suffered from similar or worse conditions of employment. Numsa in 1994, in tandem with a broader defiance campaign in the country, was still campaigning for a repeal of all segregated facilities in workplaces, and for basic workplace rights such as shopstewards training leave, time off and facilities for shopsteward committee meetings and general membership meetings.

Most of Numsa's larger engineering companies either did not endorse Numsa's workplace change strategy, or they were only willing to implement elements of it without consideration for its total strategic vision for the industry. Allen Murray, a former Group Human Resources Director at Scaw Metals, recalls why Scaw rejected the union's new strategy. Firstly it believed that the engineering industry was too large and too diverse to implement a single strategy. Employers from twenty-two different sectors sat on the Nicisemi - electronics, foundries, plastics, the rolling industry to name a few. Commented Murray, "I mean what's the connection between a foundry, steelmaking and Siemens in electronics? There's virtually no connection whatsoever... Very difficult for them to form a national strategy when they are partly competitors, partly have different interests. Very very difficult to get the chief executives to come together." Secondly, Scaw had problems with the reduction of grades and the broadbanding concept. It believed the idea was inappropriately imported from sophisticated first world Australia where the metal industry was high in technology and machine driven. It employed a limited number of highly skilled workers and few labourers. For this reason the Australian metal industry was characterised by few grades and a narrow band between the lowest paid worker and the artisan. Drawing on further first world comparisons Murray explained,

> In Europe typically the lowest paid person employed by the company will earn 80 per

> cent of what the highest paid person on the floor earns. Whereas, as you know, here it is completely different...
>
> In Europe none of the countries we visited have gone down to five grades. Many of them are still at 7, or 8 or 9. You won't find a foundry, a labour intensive plant like ours where people are fettling manually in Western Europe. Our labour intensivity makes it even harder to go down to five grades... and they were only busy trying to implement it in Australia when Lloyd came here...
>
> Scaw quickly realised it was going to cost large amounts of money to bring 13 grades into a five grade system where, for example, three grades would be concertinaed into one. The employers rapidly twigged onto to this.[139]

Recalls Murray, "This was going to be a cost. Unless you've got new machinery, a highly trained workforce which enables them to work more productively, it's just going to be a cost... To my knowledge no companies implemented it in a concerted way." Numsa's intention of course was to find mechanisms for raising workers' wages without demanding large percentage increases which employers would immediately reject. As Murray indicated however, employers quickly divined its implications. Employers were already "in a defensive mode" as the industry began to experience a downturn when South Africa exposed itself, for the first time in years, to the global economy. "It was a traumatic time business-wise the early nineties." commented Murray.

Murray also believed Numsa's logic was faulty. In his assessment, efficiency, flexibility and modernising the factory floor in the way the union framed it, meant job losses. Jobs that could not be recouped. By 1990 the engineering industry had shed 450 000 jobs. The new strategy, he believed, would accelerate this trend. In order to provide people with training opportunities the factory needed more technologically advanced and complex processes. In a contradictory manner such training opportunities entailed job losses because, according to Murray, "new equipment doesn't need a hundred people, it needs ten." Thus Scaw expressed serious reservations about Numsa's training and upward mobility theories. It was possible to absorb a few black artisans into the more technical processes in metal manufacturing, but the balance of the labour force was semi-skilled. Assessing Scaw's workforce of 2 000, Murray estimated that the promotion rate would have been about 5 per cent. Thus he commented, "This idea that there's a ladder you move up every year is a bizarre concept."

Monage too expressed this concern, "If a company is using lots of machines... people won't need that training."[140] The same logic could also be applied to the motor industry where most establishments employed workers with low levels of skill and workplaces were not technologically advanced. A limited number of artisanal workers were likewise needed although it was possible that such skills were portable into other parts of the engineering and chemical industries. Lloyd disagreed asserting that, "Skills in our industry are now about communication, logical thinking, problem solving, organisational theory, computers, quality control systems. And workers who did not get these skills would never move up in the industry and have a career path."[141] This however,

did not describe the majority of South African workplaces. In reality more and more economic analysts were pointing out that factories which required the educated, multi-skilled flexible worker were in the minority worldwide. Post-Fordism was the minority experience.[142]

Although most managements resisted workplace change in the early 1990s there were a number of cases where employers attempted to introduce more fundamental changes. Such initiatives were in the main piecemeal and were often driven by more innovative sectional managers. Murray recalls an attempt by such a manager at Scaw to introduce quality circles. This initiative was however fiercely resisted by shopstewards who believed management was usurping their powers on the factory floor. Von Holdt recounts a more successful attempt at implementing factory floor change on the tap floors in Iron Plant One at Highveld Steel in 1992. Conditions on the tap floor were dangerous, arduous and illiterate migrant workers were subject to low wages and frequent abuse from supervisors. Wildcat strikes were common. A senior shopsteward succeeded in promoting the idea that their work should be reorganised into a self-managed work team. A progressive manager was brought in to oversee the initiative. Agreement was reached on a two month training programme which workers facilitated by agreeing to work 12 hour shifts to enable each of the three shifts to undergo training. Ultimately workers succeeded in creating self-directed teams in which they controlled their own work and protected each other from the racism and victimisation of management whilst developing leadership skills. Members swiftly developed a positive attitude to their work with the change in power relations on the factory floor.[143] The training course both enhanced workers' understanding of certain technical processes and allowed for formal recognition of their unrewarded informal skills. Such experiences were rare however and did not ultimately wrest any significant control from management being isolated successes in an authoritarian apartheid structure. Too much still depended on the willingness of a more progressive manager to experiment with change.[144]

In yet other companies management's attempts at introducing a less hierarchical mode of operation caused deep divisions and precipitated violence amongst workers. One such case was Iscor in Van der Bijl Park an area where violence was endemic. The Vaal Triangle had been the centre of political violence from the mid 1980s onwards. Initially the violence had emanated mainly from attacks by security forces on local organisation but by 1990 Inkatha was beginning to stage attacks on ANC and Cosatu residents in Sebokeng Hostel. By 1992 the violence had spread to other locations and Inkatha members were launching attacks on Numsa Iscor members from their base in KwaMadala hostel. Fear, suspicion and mistrust were rife. It is against this background that the company's restructuring attempts should be seen.

By 1990 the state-owned Iscor, which produced 78 per cent of South Africa's steel, had been well-organised by Numsa. Most members were migrants from the Transkei, many of them unskilled and non-literate. The parastatal was supervised chiefly by white Afrikaners holding extreme racist

attitudes. An Iscor's head shopsteward, Jeffrey Ndamase, explained,

> Management did as they pleased, treated us like kids. Call you, then make you wait for five hours while they drank tea. Then they'd just dismiss you without a hearing. You only could use one word 'Ja boss' [Yes, boss] whether he hit you, dismissed you, spoke to you, 'Ja boss Mr Viljoen, Ja boss Mr Prinsloo.' Prinsloo said, 'I'm not prepared to talk to kaffirs[145], Iscor has 50 years, and it will go another year without a strike.'[146]

The union staged some large well-supported strikes in the 1980s. Its first strike lasted 21 days and was supported by 7 000 workers, 6 000 of whom were Numsa members. Through such actions it forced the company to provide housing for workers and their families in KwaMasiza, to abolish the hated Induna system, to agree to the installation of stoves, fridges, and heaters in every room, and to reduce the hostel rent from R48 to R13. As a result of Numsa's organisation at Iscor , shopstewards became the main force behind building the ANC and civic structures in the township of Sebokeng including the formation of self defence units in 1988.[147] In 1989 the parastatal embarked on a 'commercialisation' process in order to increase profits before privatisation and 23 000 jobs were lost. In 1990 the state sold Iscor to a private concern and a restructuring process began. The new ownership appeared more enlightened. It immediately offered workers 200 free shares in the company and a first option and 20 per cent discount on further Iscor shares in an attempt to increase workers' interest and stake in the company. After the devastating retrenchments, the union and shopstewards were suspicious of new schemes. The union saw few benefits for members' whose stake would amount to only 10 per cent of total company shares whilst most workers did not have the finances to buy further shares. It offered to buy some shares on its members' behalves and advised them to sell their free shares and to establish a trust fund to hold profits in a strike fund. This despite only a couple of years earlier a strong union position on not engaging in what were known as Esops (Employee Share Ownership Schemes). Numsa educator Adrienne Bird had articulated the union's position on such schemes,

> Workers know that if they sell these shares they would be equivalent to a very small wage increase, and once sold there would be no further benefit at all. The lesson is clear: wage increases improve workers' standard of living whereas shares do not...They are an attempt to persuade workers that by hard work and no strikes they will get more deferred income. Workers want `money in the pocket` not promises about `maybes`. What all of these schemes have also shown is that they give workers no real say over the affairs in their own workplaces... they form a sophisticated component of a wider strategy intended to weaken collective bargaining for a living wage. The aim is to benefit a few at the expense of the majority. Organised labour has no alternative but to fight these schemes.[148]

Ndamase described the response to the union purchasing the Iscor shares,

> There comes war... We didn't understand this. Lucas Thabane and Bobbie [Mare] explained, and the union bought shares for workers. `We want money not shares` said workers. I went, with some other shopstewards, to head office to talk about shares and workers told us not to return without money. Four other shopstewards went to see Ernest Sotsu , an ex-Robben Island prisoner and ANC activist in the Vaal. They told him that Jeffrey Ndamase was selling out. These shares divided people.[149]

Soon after this offer, Iscor's new management began to restructure the company in order to

compete on the world steel market. It decided to introduce the Omega quality circle programme in 1989 to black workers (it had been introduced to white workers in 1983), a Japanese management technique which emphasised worker participation in management. Shopstewards were divided on the change, "This is like deciding on how to build a house with a family. No-one can decide what to do." commented Ndamase.[150] Shopstewards demanded of management that it conduct a workshop to explain the Omega system to them. Management agreed and some shopstewards (including Ndamase) attended whilst others stayed away. After the March 1990 workshop in which, amongst other things, management spoke of producing Omega T-shirts which shopstewards saw as an attempt to replace ANC T-shirts, they became convinced the company was trying to destroy the union. "Management said Omega was successful overseas. We said you can't compare us with USA, those people have skills and earn a lot of money."[151] Shopstewards rejected its introduction. Meanwhile workers who had mostly rejected participation in Omega at a general meeting in April 1990 became convinced that Ndamase, and three other shopstewards, had been co-opted by management. At a further general meeting in June 1990, 500 workers demanded the resignation of the four shopstewards and elected an interim committee of eight. The dismissed shopstewards appealed to Numsa's Regional Congress which reinstated the four shopstewards almost a year later in April 1991. The interim committee, which by this time had expanded to become the `Top Twenty`, rejected their reinstatement. It formed a strong alliance with a local ANC hero Ernest Sotsu, (a former Umkhonto we Sizwe member and an ex-Robben Island prisoner) who at a general meeting of workers in the KwaMasiza hostel in September 1990, according to Ndamase, stated, " 'I'm ANC underground, Numsa shopsteward are sell outs' and he called for 'the elimination' of the current shopsteward's committee....Sotsu said shopstewards squandered workers' money, and that shopstewards refuse to let them join other political organisations and where are your funeral benefits, provident benefits and so on."[152]

In July 1991 Sotsu's wife and two children were murdered by unknown killers. The union, at Iscor, split in two. Some workers supported Sotsu and others the original shopstewards. Both factions armed themselves and established Self Defence Units. Management saw an opportunity to undermine the old established section of the union and started to meet with the Top Twenty. Dismissals without representation followed, rents at KwaMasiza went up, and former shopstewards were no longer permitted to raise issues with management as they were now unrepresentative. In March 1992 the Numsa local responded by expelling the Top Twenty members from the union some of whom were founder members of Numsa at Iscor. A series of killings followed between May and September 1992, mainly but not solely of Numsa shopstewards, in and around Numsa's base in the KwaMasiza flats. Eight shopstewards were shot dead, Ndamase's house was riddled with bullets but he escaped death. Numsa's legal officer in the Vaal was kidnapped but later escaped. Supporters of the Ndamase group fled KwaMasiza, "We fled. Our lives were, and still are in danger. We can't enter the flats, we can't represent workers at plant level. We are even afraid to use Iscor buses that ferry workers to the plant. MK cadres are killing us."[153] The Top

Twenty refused to accept their expulsion from the union and invited a new union, Saawu, into the plant in October 1992. Simultaneously Inkatha forces were active in the Vaal Triangle and operated from an abandoned hostel, KwaMadala, next to Iscor. This meant Numsa leadership came under attack from both quarters. Ndamase again,

> 1992, I will never ever forget that year, it was the worst year I stayed with in my life. Inkatha killing members of Numsa aligned to ANC, and other side was Kwa Masiza Top 20. I stayed around to support my people, why should I run away? The bastards offered me six months leave, but I refused. Mandela even came to the hostel to tell people who were killing to stand up and be counted. 'Til this day [1997] I am living in the hostel in Sebokeng with my family, my house destroyed."[154]

The union had to rebuild at Iscor almost from inception. Ndamase was dismissed, many workers and shopstewards left the company in fear, and Numsa was reduced from its strength of 6 000 members to 1, 005.[155]

Later Numsa assessed its mistakes. It believed it should not have sided with the original shopstewards and should have reviewed their reinstatement. It should have played a more impartial role.[156] The problems however ran much deeper. The restructuring programme was fraught with dangers many of which were beyond Numsa's control but which in retrospect demonstrated a union highly inexperienced in the conducting of workplace change.

Management was in reality ambivalent about any democratic restructuring process and was superimposing an imported model of which workers were immediately suspicious. When problems arose, it was quick to revert to a strong authoritarian anti-union stance and to divest itself of powerful shopstewards. Crouch has remarked on how any form of concertation relies on trust. He contends that in a low-trust situation where management have a history of deception and providing minimal information to workers, unions are more likely to opt for a conflict model and attempts by union leadership at concertation may appear as a betrayal of membership.[157] It was in precisely this context that Iscor shopstewards attempted to deal with employer's Omega experiment. By engaging, however minimally, with management in a low trust environment shopstewards lost membership's confidence. Von Holdt records similar divisions at Highveld Steel between more educated shopstewards wishing to reconstruct the workplace, and more marginalised and vulnerable migrants who were suspicious of shopstewards' intentions. At Highveld, migrants believed that the shopstewards had become too accommodating of management and suspected them of 'selling out' or pursuing their own careers. This too led to violence and instability in relations in the factory which inevitably rendered workplace reconstruction difficult.[158]

Iscor's restructuring initiative took place in the early 1990s before the union had more fully developed its restructuring ideas or had had the opportunity to experiment with its implementation. The Highveld experience on the tap floor was implemented later over a longer period and demonstrated that strong, well-informed factory leadership combined with a united workforce was

essential in any restructuring effort. It could not be driven by union or management head office directives. The union was also again to learn that in its choice of restructuring issues it should avoid dealing with direct monetary matters such as share distribution schemes. As Mtutuzeli Tom had aptly expressed it in the Mercedes strike in 1990, "If you put money in front of workers you can lead them in any direction." Ford's disinvestment exercise in 1988 demonstrated the same point. Ford sold to a South African company, Samcor, undertaking through a licensing agreement to supply Samcor with technology and management skills. In negotiations with the union, agreement was reached that it would sell 76 per cent of the company to Anglo American, and the remaining 24 per cent would be placed in a worker controlled trust. The money in the trust was to go towards the upliftment of the communities where workers resided in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth. In May 1988, two days before the shareholding was deposited in the trust, 3 000 Pretoria workers struck over a seven day period and ignored the union's call to return to work. Strikers vociferously rejected the trust and demanded that the company sell their shares and distribute cash payments to every worker. Workers returned once agreement had been reached on a cash pay out. The strike embarrassed Numsa and provided a sharp lesson for future disinvestment negotiations.[159] Again, in 1992, the scent of monetary pay-outs divided workers within, and from, their union.

It was evident that the issue of trust was crucial for the implementation of a successful restructuring exercise. This was not however only a question of trust between management and union membership, it was also an issue of trust *between* members as the Highveld tap floor experiment demonstrated. Neither form of trust was present in Iscor. Workers were divided and management revealed an opportunistic inclination accompanied by an indifference to Inkatha violence being perpetrated on Numsa and ANC members in the area. Numsa had miscalculated on the sensitivity of the political context. It was in reality almost impossible to engage in a restructuring exercise in such a fraught context.

The union was to learn that it should either fully engage in a restructuring effort and inject concentrated resources and support leadership or leave it alone. Partial restructuring lent itself to opening up cracks for division and violence to enter. The difficulty for the union was that restructuring attempts presented themselves in different forms and guises in different factories. Often management restructuring initiatives hid ulterior motives or a faddish interest in new production techniques. In other cases top management supported new approaches on the factory floor but such initiatives were thwarted by lower supervisorial levels of management. In yet other cases the success of change initiatives depended on the union's relationship with management in the factory and upon whether a particular individual on the company's side was willing to undertake a more transparent democratic process with workers in a particular section. Shopstewards responses to restructuring was also decisive and if management change initiatives were regarded with suspicion the project was doomed. The union still needed to analyse what was

common to these initiatives in order to lay down generic guidelines and principles to assist membership in their assessment of whether, and how, to engage in such projects. As it was, membership was left to muddle through such initiatives sometimes with disastrous consequences. By 1995 the union had not succeeded in its aim of democratising the apartheid workplace and increasing workers' participation and control at the point of production. Membership had no more power than before the introduction of the three year programme, and in fact many had experienced a disempowerment because of the confusion around the implementation of the programme.

5. Return to workers' control

By the end of 1995 the leadership of the union was witnessing the demise of the three year bargaining programme even though many appreciated the importance of the issues with which it was grappling. The union had succeeded in implementing aspects of the programme but had largely failed to implement it holistically. Its most obvious failure had been around the extension of workers' control on the shopfloor. It had barely approached the thorny task of flattening hierarchies in the workplace. It was still battling to get companies transparently to reveal future plans, and investment and profit distribution decisions without which it was unable to have any meaningful say over the way in which the company was organised or the distribution of profits.

The leadership in characteristic Numsa style continued its process of reflection and evaluation although many of the architects of the three year bargaining programme had by now left the union including Lloyd, Erwin, and Fanaroff. Most of this took place through informal discussions although some was finding its way into more formal structures. The core of the developing critique appeared to focus on a return to the factory, a return to meaningful consultation with members, a return to democratic processes of mandates and report-backs. In essence a return to workers' control at the point of production.[160] The 1995 National Bargaining Conference agreed on a national programme of regional and local shopstewards meetings, linked to key negotiating dates, to ensure continuous report-backs and mandates from members. It also agreed that working groups in centralised bargaining forums should not be allowed to take on an independent life.[161]

An Eastern Cape shopsteward articulated what was becoming clear to the union, "We need to focus on how to involve workers in the process of wage negotiations. The concept is right, but we need to work out how the factory floor can take control of some part of the process."[162] Hartford believed that the union should acknowledge that it did not have the capacity to address numerous transformation issues and needed to shift to a slower, more focussed, and more methodical mode of operation, "All of these things are about controlling working lives, and if you can't do that, don't do the other things, stay where you can control and do it piece by piece."[163] Union leadership came to believe that membership's loss of control over operational and strategic decisions had weakened Numsa's ability effectively to act. As Numsa organiser Dumisane Mbanjwa noted, "It is not easy to pull out an action without people understanding what the issues are."[164] The 1995

National Bargaining Conference recommended that the union revisit its former campaign strategy to inform members of core demands, using slogans such as `Close the apartheid wage gap!` Such campaigns would both explain and simplify issues and ensure members' actions underpinned union demands. Accompanying the call to return to the factory floor was a belief that new and creative ideas would emanate from the shopfloor. As Mare put it, "Real innovation in the industry is going to happen at a local level in isolated and unpredictable ways. So for a while there's going to be no clear systematic plan for the way forward."[165]

At the core of this shift in emphasis was the role of the shopsteward and the shopstewards committee. In the auto sector, Hartford suggested that the shopstewards council, which met four times a year, should develop goals for training, work organisation, productivity, and pay-for-performance agreements. Such goals would then be negotiated at different plants. The sharing of experiences by shopstewards across companies was essential to the success of this strategy in order to evaluate where the best agreements were being negotiated and to permit creative problem solving. According to Hartford the strengthening of the auto shopstewards council would permit the necessary openess and discussion on future directions, "I was doing these functions, now I'm doing those. I used to have one boss, and one foreman, looking after thirty workers, but now I'm in a team of eight with a team leader right inside watching me every minute. Ask the members what to do about it, they'll tell you. You need a proper collective bargaining process where you can share this with comrades."[166]

The new emphasis on worker innovation and control at the point of production begged the question of what role the national union was to play. In this regard the leadership believed the national and regional levels of the union should embark on a rigorous programme of appropriate education and training. "We need to equip shopstewards and organisers better. Our education department must be familiar with the contents of agreements that we have signed. It must develop an implementation module for shopstewards and work out training in terms of what the issues are." declared Monage.[167] Shopstewards needed clear guidelines from which to operate. Such guidelines would, for example, assist with the reduction of grades, or make suggestions on how to respond to a change from manual machinery to automation, or give guidance on what questions to ask in response to a company restructuring exercise as a result of tariff reductions. Shopstewards should have access to cost breakdowns on company operations and become familiar with matters that directly impacted on production costs such as tariff headings (The Department of Trade and Industry utilising complex coding itemises goods that are imported into South Africa and attaches a standard tax for the particular product) and prices of raw materials. Training on the intelligent reading of company information such as budgets, graphs, tables and cash flows should be provided to shopstewards. A pool of researchers should be available for shopstewards to utilise as a resource to discuss and evaluate information provided by management. A stronger link should exist between research, education and collective bargaining and in all these areas a detailed

understanding of processes unfolding on the factory floor was necessary. Research should be based on workplace information from shopstewards, and return to a shopstewards' caucus to discuss and develop strategies.

Hartford believed that an understanding of company and product information was just the beginning. Such knowledge was only useful if it was combined with a mastery of negotiating skills. "It's a skill, but there's never been a workshop on negotiation skills - needs bargaining, interest bargaining - what's the difference? What can we bargain substantively, and what can't we." The best the union could do for its members was to equip shopstewards with basic principles, guidelines, and information to apprehend such issues as productivity, performance improvement, and the negotiation of adequate wages. In Lloyd's words, "The best productivity agreement is fairly simple. A set of protection clauses, so members don't cut their throats and leave the rest up to plant level. Trust your members more. They know more about work than you do. Train them how to bargain, but not what they want and what's good or bad for them. They know and can negotiate that best." Schreiner concurred,

> The union's going to have to accept it becomes looser than in the past. More things will have to be handled by stewards who may at times mess up, and that's too bad, it's part of a learning experience. The idea seems to still prevail that you've got to have an official at negotiations. That's got to end. I think organisers shouldn't be too much in factories because the complexities of production and manufacturing makes it impossible for your average official to make a sensible contribution.[168]

Thus union intellectuals had come full circle to Gramsci's radical concepts of worker education and the seizure of power. In his philosophy of praxis he believed that only through confronting concrete practical problems on the factory floor could workers access genuine power. In order to resolve such problems commissars needed to study, discuss and fully understand any technical innovations proposed by management and ensure that there were comrades responsible for in depth professional training of workers. He viewed education of workers in a dynamic and innovative way which involved commissars organising schools in factories for increasing workers' skills in their own trades and in the understanding of a complex range of industrial functions.[169] Yet Gramsci's project did not end at the point of production. Such innovations at a workplace level encompassed a dynamic relationship with a much broader political, cultural and economic role for working people. In reasserting the primary decision-making role of shopstewards and members in the factory Numsa leadership was acknowledging an area of neglect. This `back to basics` approach did not however address why it had been necessary to build national power in the first place. The union would still have to address its relationship and responsibilities to the attainment of power and influence nationally as part of a working class programme. This had always been its project. It had never confined itself to narrow trade union issues. It was hardly likely to relinquish this role and minimise the power it had built at a national level.

6. Conclusion

By the end of 1995 how far had Numsa progressed in its attempts to build a new democratic dispensation in the powerful sector of manufacturing that it organised? How far had it succeeded in asserting working class interests and influence in the new democratic South Africa?

There is no doubt that the union had achieved considerable bargaining successes through the power of its various bargaining forums combined with its creative demands and campaigning, strategic industrial action and skilful bargaining. This was no small feat when taking into account the levels of violence, disruption, and upheaval that assailed the society. The union had also experienced huge numerical growth and a marked increase in bureaucratic efficiency characterised by tightly structured democratic centres of governance. Yet its three year bargaining and industrial restructuring programmes, which represented its attempts at democratising and reconstructing industry and the economy, was a long way from being realised by the end of 1995. Its programme had unraveled particularly in respect of reconstructing the workplace where both practical and ideological confusion militated against its successful implementation. Furthermore membership confusion around the ideas underpinning the programme and its implementation revealed a glaring gap between national leadership and its base.

The national leadership of the union, in an attempt to increase its efficiency in what it perceived as a limited transitional space in which to attain its goals, had sacrificed important degrees of democratic interaction. Leadership's critique of the failure to implement its three year programme thus focused on a return to workplace democracy and on deepening workers' control of the union. It perceived that ultimately the union would operate more effectively if driven by the knowledge and consensus of its base. It was here amongst its membership, it believed, that its strength lay. This return to building power in individual workplaces as a means of mobilising membership was reminiscent of the tactics that the union engaged with in the 1970s and early 1980s. The difference was that now workplaces would be supported by a more efficient national bureaucracy which would assist membership with the more complex restructuring issues of the 1990s.

This was however clearly a limited reactive response. The union had spent years building national power following the Gramscian notion of exercising power through a system of councils elected at the workplace and co-ordinated in a local and national hierarchy to realize the unity of the working class. Its goal had been to insert workers' interests into the mainstream of the society. It had operated in a revolutionary, but gradualist, manner to achieve this. The power that this had lent the union in achieving its task was huge. Yet there was clearly a tension between the operations of the national and grassroots levels of the union. An over elaborating bureaucracy accompanied in some cases by poor servicing and lack of systematic education and information campaigns had alienated its base. Originally the union had been built on the principles of workers' control and internal democracy precisely to avoid this trap. Yet, as Crouch asserts, participation by trade union leadership in national economic matters can often be at the expense of the local level and can

undermine what workers perceive their primary interests to be. This was precisely the tension that emerged in Numsa as the national level strengthened. Thus while such matters as increased wages were of primary interest to Numsa membership despite a commitment to a broader agenda, for leadership the need to restructure industry in order to end massive job losses, enhance workers' skills and remuneration and increase workers' control at the point of production became a primary objective. This was of course directly in membership's interest and workers might have put considerable weight behind this national pre-occupation had the three year bargaining programme demonstrated sufficient immediate gains to harness membership's long-term support.

The alienation of national leadership from its base cannot however be seen in the manner Michels perceives the history of organisation as reflecting " ... a continued series of class struggles and the doctrine that class struggles invariably culminate in the creation of new oligarchies which undergo fusion with the old."[170] His contention that ultimately leaders of political parties, trade unions and other social formations will dominate their membership whatever the rhetoric of democracy and that working class organisations will become subject to an 'iron law of oligarchy' does not usefully describe what was unfolding in Numsa. His thesis that a specialised national bureaucracy creates 'interests peculiar to itself'[171] which are conservative in nature, and of necessity demand a more defensive and even reactionary policy whereas the interests of the working class demand a bold and aggressive policy, is too simplistic. Firstly the tradition of workers' democracy which had been the union's founding principle was too deeply embedded in the fabric of the union to be swiftly buried. It is this thesis' contention that the principles that underpinned its conception rendered the union receptive to certain ideas and ways of approaching and representing its base and less receptive to other means of conducting its goals. Thus even after changes in leadership a manner of operation had been established which could allow new strategies to be taken forward and rearranged within the context of a former commitment to strong factory floor representation.

Secondly, the leadership was attempting to introduce bold and radical reforms in order to further the interests of its members and the working class. In this endeavour it substantially lost touch with its shopfloor base yet this remained a vibrant and autonomous force despite its inability necessarily to comprehend or embrace national policy. Strikes and industrial activity at the shopfloor level continued apace. Crouch contends that, "Where there is institutionalisation and mutual acceptance of each others permanency there is a move away from the combative model."[172] This was clearly not true in the Numsa case. When Numsa entered its centralised national bargaining forums as a genuine power it held the new responsibility to ensure that these institutions continued strongly to function as institutions in themselves and did not collapse through a lack of support. This inevitably entailed a more considered and cautious approach to these institutions as the union's own fortunes were now strongly bound up with their continued existence. This had the potential to make leadership less militant and less ready to take risks. It was here that shopfloor activity remained crucial. In a paradoxical situation industrial action and

militancy on the factory floor was the means by which the union maintained some degree of autonomy from the institutions it was simultaneously invested in strengthening. In a proper balance this becomes a healthy tension. Yet it would also not necessarily be true to say that such local actions represented a more progressive and forward-looking policy than that of national leadership. Baskin laments that many post 1994 strikes were 'unplanned, poorly led, and ill-disciplined and may be seen as examples of weakness rather than strength."[173] Erwin had pointed out that despite democratically constituted structures the union could not remain at the level of rank and file. He believed a dialectical process of harnessing workers' 'experiential richness' and 'through dialogue and a process' converting it 'into theory' operated in the organisation. Indeed membership had elected national leadership because it trusted it to take its interests forward. Leadership in turn was focused on pursuing a far-sighted policy which would protect the interests of its members, achieve greater levels of participation and control, and through the reconstruction of the economy represent working class interests more broadly. Crouch views the 'disparity in the logic of action at these levels [local versus national]' as 'the contemporary tragedy of the labour movement'.[174] Erwin on the other hand viewed it as 'a tension that you must live with.' Crouch overstates the tension and almost embraces Michel's position. Erwin in turn underestimated the negative impact of the tension at this historical juncture. Ultimately it was a question of balance. It was a balance that the union once held in check but which had now veered out of alignment.

Besides the tension between national leadership and the shopfloor, flaws in the assumptions behind the three year bargaining programme began to reveal themselves. International literature on post-Fordist production methods was revealing that the educated, multi-skilled, flexible worker of the future was the minority experience. In fact, in South Africa at the time, the use of computer technology was still minimal, and few employers used participative management techniques. Blacks were semi-skilled workers, and whites, the skilled workers, were in different unions. This made it difficult to develop a common union strategy. The low level of skill in South Africa was a huge barrier to embracing this new system of world production. Indeed many believed that the training/promotions model that Numsa had adopted was becoming an ideological cover for retrenchment and a more polarised labour market especially in terms of remuneration. The emphasis on training was serving as an ideological legitimation device for government and business by making it appear that they were taking genuine steps to reduce inequalities in the society.[175] Research in Canada revealed that more available state-subsidised post-secondary education had resulted in better employment rates than the previous emphasis on employer training programmes had been able to do.[176] Viewed in this way it could be said that the Numsa model allowed government to reduce its educational responsibilities by outsourcing critical provisions to business. In addition such technical training was narrow in its application and did not promote analytic or critical thinking. Gramsci too had promoted employer participation in the acquisition of skills but such technical education was complemented by vibrant Socialist Clubs, and discussion and education through communist party structures, as well as within factory councils on

the nature and implications of management technological innovations. Mawu had attained much of this socialist discursive vibrancy but without the technical and skills aspect of such education. Gramsci however perceived the interconnectedness of all these forms of education and training. In Numsa skills and technical training was being administered in an ideological vacuum.

The union had also underestimated the major obstacles to the implementation of its programme. It had underestimated government's ability rapidly to put into effect appropriate structures and this compromised, for example, the engineering sector in its attempts to provide visible evidence of its training policies. But more than this the union underestimated employer reluctance to implement its programmes and the tenacity of apartheid practices and attitudes in factories. A clear lack of will was evident on most (although there were a few exceptions) employers' parts radically to alter the status quo. Apartheid relations were still the everyday lived experience of membership and militated against a more co-determinist approach to negotiating relationships in factories. For many workers it was still class war and at times a strike, even if messy, meant that employers lost more than they did because they had so little to lose. Strikes were as much an expression of anger and frustration as they were a means of wresting more money or of correcting an injustice. Such frustrations could not be expressed across the co-determinist negotiating table where workers were being asked to give up their only weapon - the strike. As Hyman has pointed out strikes are the means by which labour refuses to become a commodity and they give workers the opportunity to release tensions experienced in an oppressive work situation. South African workers still had years of accumulated rage to release. But did such actions increase their power to assert working class influence in a new South Africa?

In order to answer the above question, another question needs to be asked. Was it possible to build power in a transitional period such as this? Leadership saw the transition as an important space to seize further control for workers. Workers however were not ready for the imposition of a new programme. They were still locked in the anger, poverty and frustrations of the past. They needed the space to vent frustrations and develop a new vision thereafter. Baskin saw the numerous strikes as undirected and unplanned signs of weakness but were they? It is likely that a transitional period was needed where workers could express their resentment at the continuance of the apartheid workplace regime. In order to reconstruct a degree of fragmentation and disintegration needed to occur, even if this at times erupted into violence. Although change in the country did not take the form of an abrupt revolutionary rupture, there was still the need for a degree of breakdown in order to create spaces in which to rebuild. Leadership feared that such costly, messy and undirected strikes would lead to further job losses and a consequent weakening of the union. The lessons of the 1970s and early 1980s were forgotten. The slow incremental building, the careful concern and space for the development of workers' consciousness and intellectual engagement was lost. This was not the time for the introduction of a major new programme. In retrospect it can be seen that there were too many elements of the society that needed careful and

considered transformation for the union to carry through all the initiatives upon which it had embarked. It was impossible for an institution of its size to tackle a society riven with an abnormal load of inequalities. This was a time perhaps to lobby for institutional and legal change, but it was also a time to pause, assess, regroup and unify. It was a time to return to membership with extensive education programmes, to consolidate ideological and political positions, and jointly to develop a programme to move forward. That the union did not do this was an indication that it had moved a vast distance from its heterodox Marxism, personified by Gramscian inclusive and non-hierarchical notions of how the struggle for socialism should be waged which had underpinned organising approaches in Mawu and which Naawu's intellectuals had also come to endorse. Gramsci had asserted that ideology or 'integrated culture' as he called it, was central to any process of change. Ideological hegemony was something that was historically developed and advanced in stages through incessant struggle. He denied that immediate economic crises produced radical change, or were indicators of revolutionary rupture. He eschewed such economic determinism. He believed a political initiative was needed to 'free the political direction from the shackles of traditional politics'[177] It was the role of the ideological struggle in the process for change that Numsa leaders had neglected. High expectations had been created as a result of rapid political change but no ideological hegemony or consensus existed as to how to harness these expectations and on how to proceed and promote working class power. Workers needed the space to assess and understand what was at stake. Accompanying this ideological vacuum was a high degree of instability in the union. Old structures and leaders were disappearing, new ones being created. All this was testimony to a society undergoing rapid change. In Gramsci's view such fluidity formed part of the activist's challenge to respond appropriately and seize the opportunity to refine or reform structures and further the workers' struggle. In Numsa's case, as Erwin had expressed it, "It [the three year plan] was too sophisticated at that point" and much confusion ensued as structures were not reinforced or properly supported. The union was floundering for a direction that struck resonance with both leadership and membership as was the case in the early days of struggle. The challenge was in fact not to push ahead with a new programme but to assess, educate and then to move forward equipped with a well-supported programme of change.

Changes taking place in the country allowed for the possibility of forging a new ideological consensus but it was an opportunity the union, and indeed the labour movement, missed and thus the possibility of introducing a new vision, such as the three year bargaining programme, without such consensus was doomed. It is with these comments in mind that this thesis advances to an analysis of Numsa and its predecessors' political development to more fully understand why such a gap emerged.

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Chapter 11
Autonomous worker movement
1980 -1986

1. Introduction

The previous chapter investigated Numsa's attempts to implement a post-apartheid vision through its bargaining and industrial restructuring programmes and thus dealt chiefly with its efforts to effect an economic transformation in the metal industry. Numsa's political development however was largely excluded from this examination although it was touched on where it impacted sharply on the bargaining and organisational life of the union. The following two chapters will explore Numsa's political life and in so doing will present a more complex picture of the context in which the union was operating and the pressures it was experiencing. It will also illustrate how its dominant political and bargaining policies ultimately complemented one another and in some respects suffered from similar weaknesses.

The opening of the new decade of the 1980s immediately presented the metal unions with new political challenges as a result of which Numsa and its predecessors would undergo significant shifts. This chapter deals with the political evolution of Naawu and Mawu, and to a lesser extent Micwu which focussed more narrowly on union issues of servicing membership, although it too would make a significant break with its past political alignments. The chapter will demonstrate, in the manner that Giddens has noted, how social movements shape, define, and redefine themselves in antagonism to opposing groups which may be either established organisations or rival movements.[1] Thus Mawu, Naawu and ultimately Micwu, defined themselves in opposition to the policies of the state and, in Mawu's case at least, to the prevailing capitalist mode of production. In so doing however they also positioned themselves at a tangent, and in tension with, historical liberation and socialist formations including the ANC, the racially exclusive black consciousness movement, the PAC, and the non-racial but still Stalinist inflected South African Communist Party (SACP). The chapter will also explore how Naawu and Mawu's jealously guarded independent politics came under intense pressure as they were forced to confront the issue of forging political alliances. Issues of union independence thus loom large in this exploration as do questions concerning the nature of their democratic socialist programme.

Much has been written on the non-racial unions that fully emerged in the 1980s and their relationship with politics. Most of this commentary has focussed on the politics of the labour federations that existed in this period, namely Fosatu and Cosatu, but in this process the politics of

their major affiliates has obviously also been spotlighted. It will be seen that both Mawu and Numsa emerge as controversial in their politics and Numsa's politics was often viewed as the most independent and outside of the mainstream within the Cosatu federation. This meant that they elicited an hostility at times from other trade unions and political formations. Both unions however were associated with raising levels of debate to impressive levels. Indeed people interviewed in this study repeatedly refer to the degree of tolerance, and the advanced level of political debate that characterised, and was associated with, these unions. Despite their controversial standpoints however, they seldom adopted positions which would drive them to the point of marginalisation. Indeed their contributions often formed the basis of important federation policy.

2. Independent workers' movement: 1980 -1984

Introduction

As previously mentioned the new decade presented new political challenges to the unions which are the subject of this study. In the early 1980s these challenges would centre on whether, how, and when to participate in alliances with other organisations without compromising the unions' independence from particular political ideologies and formations. The question of how to engage in alliances is obviously an issue that all working class and socialist organisations have to consider in their search for accession to power and it was certainly not new to South African working class politics.[2] Potential alliances for working class organisations in South Africa however had always been a contentious issue. A strong working class party which incorporated card-carrying mass membership had never existed. The SACP had never possessed a mass following. In the past mass black political organisation, such as that represented by the Congress Alliance, had engaged in popular nationalist politics where the goal was to forge a nation free of the inequalities between colonist and colonised, black and white. Historically trade unions and their federations had been the vehicles of working class organisation and they had never managed to introduce strong working class programmes into political organisations. Fosatu and its unions in the early 1980s were confronted with the same situation and the dilemmas that this presented, namely how to assert the hegemony of working class goals over existing political organisation. Their one advantage was that they were probably the largest and most organised black movement in the country.

At the dawn of the 1980s Naawu, Mawu and Micwu demonstrated a marked independence from political formations, most notably from popular nationalist organisations such as the ANC and SACP. The maintenance of this autonomy was to preoccupy Mawu and Naawu in the early 1980s. Their political stance was primarily articulated by their federation, Fosatu, of which Naawu's Joe Foster became general secretary in 1982. Foster's 1981 statement below typified the fears and independent outlook that defined these unions' political outlook,

> So everybody gets the vote - so what's that going to change? Not a damn. I mean [Chief Kaiser] Matanzima [leader of Transkei homeland] has proved this - look at Kenya for

> example - that in actual fact is not what we're striving for... We will stay out of politics until such time as there is a political party that we can align ourselves with ... We don't mind being small and so on - as long as we keep on plugging our lines. I can't see that the national liberation movement is striving for the same type of society as us.[3]

Yet there were differences in political outlook between the metal unions. As has already been outlined Micwu, Naawu and Mawu emerged from different traditions and these varying lineages imprinted themselves on their politics.

Micwu had been nurtured in the politically conservative Tucsa tradition which engaged in `orthodox or collective bargaining unionism.`[4] It had been a victim of Tucsa's ambivalent attitude towards organising black workers when, in 1969, the Federation encouraged its white unions to expel coloured membership following the announcement that the Nationalist Party intended to legislate to enforce racially separate unions. Former Micwu General Secretary, Des East, recalls the politicised nature of the decision as white unions, eager to rid themselves of their coloured members, donated finances to establish the new coloured union and assisted it with the administrative work necessary to become a registered union. The new union nevertheless stayed in the Tucsa laager in the absence of any other federation with which to affiliate. Its political stance was viewed as conservative compared to those of Naawu and Mawu but in its own terms it addressed politically charged issues within Tucsa. The first of these was Micwu's insistence in the late 1970s that African workers be organised. As previously described, Tucsa's attitude to organising African workers was largely instrumental and demonstrated little interest in their working lives. Thus any initiative within their ranks genuinely to represent Africans became a political issue. In the late 1970s, in the absence of industrial relations legislation to protect Africans, Micwu established a parallel African union into which it rapidly recruited members. Its decision to do so within the Tucsa fold, and to attend meetings of the International Metalworkers Federation where `radical` unions such as Mawu and Naawu sat, sparked considerable debate and was not viewed favourably in Tucsa. Its change in name at this point from the Motor Industry *Coloured* Workers Union to the Motor Industry *Combined* Workers Union symbolised this change in recruitment policy. Micwu's seriousness of purpose was reflected by its recruitment of at least 20 000 African members up until its merger into Numsa in 1987. It nevertheless projected itself as a `non-political` union, an image which General Secretary Ronn Webb was concerned to perpetuate. Thus he opposed Micwu's entry into the International Metalworkers Federation. Webb nevertheless brought to the fore the underlying political premises on which Tucsa was based when in 1981 he approached Micwu provincial general meetings to endorse his invitation to sit on the Tricameral Parliament as a coloured representative. The majority of membership refused to support him, although, ironically, many African members believed he could perhaps make a difference, and he was forced to resign as General Secretary of the union.[5] When East became General Secretary in 1981 a policy shift occurred when in the interest of worker unity in the metal sector he

made the decision to enter the IMF. Nevertheless Micwu remained politically neutral and none of its national office bearers involved themselves in politics or belonged to any political party. East recalls that when he was harassed and searched for four hours at the Lesotho border in 1984 after an IMF meeting in Maseru, which included the humiliation of having to read out loud the minutes of meetings of his daughter's nursery school, the response of the Micwu national executive was `that you brought it upon yourself`.[6]

Micwu was to remain in Tucsa until 1984 when its opposition to the Nationalist tri-cameral parliament, and Tucsa's open endorsement of it, highlighted Micwu's divergence from this conservative Federation. The debate that Micwu triggered at the Tucsa Conference was prolonged and culminated in 11 unions voting for the Micwu resolution, 61 abstaining, and 2 voting against, which in East's words, reflected how `no-one wanted to take a position in Tucsa.`[7] Micwu's political decision to resign from Tucsa sent shock waves through the Federation's hierarchy especially as Micwu's large African membership lent it credibility. Tucsa's General Secretary, Arthur Grobelaar coincidentally suffered a heart attack after receiving Micwu's resignation letter and East was told that `you nearly killed Arthur.`! Micwu's departure signalled shifts in Tucsa. From 1984 onwards a number of white conservative unions joined the Federation while it also witnessed a flood of resignations from unions organising across all race groups. Micwu now entered a political wilderness. Its older coloured membership remained a conservative force whilst its younger African members pushed for a more radical stance. Changes in the union, according to East, were driven by the `young guard` and not by its coloured leadership. African leadership progressively began to emerge at a provincial level although the national leadership remained coloured and `politically neutral`. The union formally joined the IMF in 1984, although thoughts of a metal merger were not on its agenda as yet. It was welcomed by other IMF members including Naawu and Mawu which emphasised the concept of unity in the sector and a joint executive was established.[8] Thereafter it was only a matter of time before Micwu felt ready to engage in merger talks which culminated in its entry into Numsa in 1987 and into the highly politicised Cosatu.

Naawu too came from this Tucsa tradition via its merged parts Numarwosa, UAW and WPMawu. Both WPMawu and Numarwosa's departure from Tucsa's ranks in 1973 and 1976 respectively however had permitted them to explore an alternative vision at a much earlier date than Micwu. In addition Numarwosa's experience of organising, and working with its African parallel, UAW, in the early 1970s had radicalised it and made it more receptive to non-racial labour formations and politics. Numarwosa together with UAW also became the first Fosatu union directly to confront the issue of wider political involvement in the 1979 Ford strike. This was partly because the Eastern and Western Cape were the most politically mobilised regions of the country at the time, and partly because of the Eastern Cape's legacy of resistance which had resulted in the presence of former PAC and ANC activists in the union's ranks. Their presence in UAW led the Port Elizabeth

Black Civic Organisation (Pebco) activists to believe they could draw on the union's support during their dispute with the company over Thozamile Botha's forced resignation (see chapter 2). The politically inexperienced union mismanaged this solidarity call and had thus created the space for Macwusa to establish a strong presence in the Ford Cortina plant.

Naawu's focus on building shopfloor strength had drawn it closer to Mawu in the IMF forums of the 1970s and had resulted in them uniting under the umbrella of Fosatu. Mawu, like Naawu eschewed wider political involvement in favour of building strong factory organisation. Ginsburg describes Mawu in the early 1980s as a "compromise between professional and grassroots intellectuals" leading to "a non political but worker-controlled trade union."[9] Ginsburg's definition of politics is however extremely narrow encompassing only state power. Buroway's more inclusive conception which embraces the arena of productive politics is a more useful way of assessing Mawu's political standpoint.[10] "A non political but worker-controlled trade union" was the outer manifestation of the union's politics as for security reasons it could not publicly declare its long term socialist aims. It was also reluctant to reveal its intentions to a wider political community until it had built up sufficient strength to assert worker hegemony in any political alliances it might forge. Broad agreement existed on building a strong, democratic union underpinned by worker strength on the factory floor but this did not entail an absence of strong politics. For both professional and organic intellectuals the union's purpose was profoundly political and a common understanding existed that the apartheid state had to be destroyed. `A worker controlled trade union` points to the essence of the politics that dominated the union's highly independent position in the early 1980s. It was a vision of socialist transformation and not of orthodox collective bargaining unionism. Fanaroff believes that early Mawu unionists could best be described as `syndicalists` who envisaged working class control over the organs of state power but not through a vanguardist leadership or party as in a Leninist model.[11] The leadership believed that through the accrual of organised worker power and the creation of a working class social movement, they could ensure the primacy of working class concerns in a future non-racial South Africa. This was the dominant strain of political thought in the union in the early 1980s which according to Bethuel Maseremule, a Mawu organiser and Numsa regional secretary, `found favour with shopstewards as well as officials`.[12] Enoch Godongwana, a Mawu organiser and later Numsa general secretary, traces some opposition to this dominant strain as early as 1981 but also notes that "in the initial stages I was happy with this position."[13]

Naawu's politics in this period was characterised by Maseremule as being "all over the show".[14] Its predecessors UAW, Numarwosa and WPMawu had been attracted to Mawu precisely because of its production politics which entailed a focus on factory floor organisation. They did not however unreservedly adopt Mawu's socialist politics although this was not for want of Mawu trying. Fanaroff wryly recalls "... standing outside the offices in Korsten [Port Elizabeth] in about

‘78 and persuading Fred Sauls, who wanted more of a connection with the ANC, that we shouldn’t because the ANC wouldn’t take power for at least 30 years and by that time we would’ve built an extremely powerful socialist movement and Fred backed off.”[15] Naawu’s leadership and membership came from disparate traditions and this was reflected in the union’s politics. Joe Foster the General Secretary of WPMawu had socialist leanings. He recalls, “I was influenced by school teachers who were members of the Teachers League which was affiliated to the Unity Movement.”[16] The Unity Movement was strong in the Western Cape and had originally emerged from a Trotskyist tradition.[17] Sauls had flirted with the ethnically exclusive Coloured Labour Party[18] in the 1960s but rejected it in 1969 when it entered the Coloured Persons Representative Council. Kettledas too had supported the Labour Party in the 1970s because “they were elected on a ticket of better conditions for workers.”[19] Later the union distanced itself from the Labour Party after it attacked Naawu for the industrial unrest and its alleged unreasonable demands in the rolling strikes of 1982. Any possible relationship was finally terminated when the Labour Party endorsed the tricameral parliament at its conference in Eshowe in 1983. Yet many of Naawu’s coloured members remained supporters of the Labour Party which in the early 1980s Kettledas estimates as having about 89 per cent of coloured support in the Eastern Cape.[20] Naawu’s African membership and leadership came mainly from the Eastern Cape and had different sympathies. A number of shopstewards expressed allegiance to Azapo whilst John Gomomo came from an ANC tradition, and Mbuyi Ngwenda from the SACP. Many among its large Eastern Cape African membership had strong sympathies with African liberation movements such as the PAC and, in particular, the ANC.[21] Maseremule recalls that Naawu “was often more sympathetic to the smaller general unions and the Congress Movement[22] ”[23] whilst Godongwana also recalls it having “a stronger tendency towards the ANC”.[24]

Thus, in the early 1980s Micwu was still firmly ensconced in the Tucsa camp and had not asserted a strong political position. Mawu and Naawu were characterised by an independence from any interference by political or community organisations in their operations. Mawu guarded its independence on the grounds of differing politics. Naawu’s position however was less homogeneous. Some of its leadership thought along similar lines to Mawu, others argued that trade union matters and politics were separate spheres of operation, whilst yet others were sympathetic to the more populist, nationalist politics that Mawu eschewed.

Politics and the sticky question of alliances

Introduction

Between 1979 and 1981 Naawu, Mawu and their federation Fosatu were increasingly forced to confront the issue of politics as it was being played out beyond the factory floor. In Uitenhage shopstewards were already giving leadership to community organisation and on the East Rand

discussions in shopstewards councils frequently turned to political matters. Yet the leadership of Mawu and Naawu resisted active engagement. It would be apt here to unpack Ginsburg's comment that Mawu was `non political`[25] and to ask what is constituted by the term `political`. Late in 1980 Joe Foster expressed a view which in many ways characterised Fosatu and these metal unions' political position,

> The point is this - we are not in a position of strength, let's face it. Look at the percentage of the labour force that is organised. I mean it's peanuts man. You can't fight the state and employers at the same time. We need to be strongly organised to fight the employers. Where's the strength to take on the state?... Once we're organised then we can say `get stuffed`. People say we're organised when in fact we're weak.[26]

Many critics interpreted Foster's comments as being an expression of political abstentionism. In reality they were a statement about power. The unions were not in a position to take on the state. This was a contestation which had to be deferred. `Professional and grassroots intellectuals` alike consequently deferred engagement in what they considered to be `politics`, and preferred to pursue the nuts and bolts business of building what they believed to be real power – the power of the shopfloor. There were two problems with this approach. Firstly it tended to defer any consideration of the subject leaving it unproblematised, undifferentiated and anonymous. Yet in reality politics was constituted as distinct but interlinking spheres which required different modes and rates of engagement. Secondly, politics was played out on local as well as national terrains, and abstentionism from local politics could confront the trade unions with as many difficulties as they avoided.

Events during the period 1979-1981 forced a more serious and sustained intellectual engagement with the issue of politics. The Thozamile Botha episode at the Ford Cortina plant in Port Elizabeth graphically illustrated the potential cost of non-engagement. The 1980 general strike in Uitenhage which was a local power struggle of epic proportions revealed the political dimension of industrial struggles, and signalled the acquisition of the power that might ultimately be utilised in `political` struggles. Indeed the very wielding of industrial power, however shakily it might be based, made it more difficult to defer deploying it in local political struggles, such as those over housing in Katlehong in 1981 -1982. In 1982 Moses Mayekiso, a Mawu organiser, registered this shift when he declared, "Mawu is not just a union anymore. It is a movement of workers fighting for liberation."[27]

Two other developments in 1981 – 1982, forced the issue of local politics, national politics and political alliances firmly on to the metal unions' agenda. The first was the British Leyland strike in the Western Cape in 1981. The second was the death of trade unionist Neil Aggett in detention in February 1982.

British Leyland strike 1981

The 1980s dawned to a flourishing of black community and labour organisations, including what became known as the `community unions` whose membership was small, and which had little strength on the factory floor, but which were active and influential in national and community politics. In this climate it became difficult for Fosatu and its affiliates to ignore calls to take a public stand on political matters. All three unions entered the 1980s with little experience of alliance politics outside of the labour arena. Micwu as a Tucsa union was aloof from any such issues. Naawu and Mawu viewed overtures from community organisations with suspicion seeing them as threatening a potential populist dilution of their socialist and trade union aims. It was in the Western Cape in 1981 during a strike at British Leyland however that Naawu first forged a significant relationship beyond the factory floor with local community organisations.[28] Although the union was slow to accept community support, and engagement was very much on Naawu's terms, the relationship demonstrated to the union the potential power of such an alliance.

Influenced by the Volkswagen R2 an hour living wage strike, coloured workers at Leyland who were known to be less militant than their Eastern Cape counterparts, advanced the same demand. According to a European Economic Community (EEC) Code of Conduct laid down in December 1980, British companies operating in South Africa were obliged to pay at least R1, 67 an hour. At Leyland the minimum wage was R1, 30 an hour. Management claimed that wages were low because the `going rate` in Cape Town was lower than elsewhere in the country. Workers knew however that a boom in the motor industry was underway and that Leyland's turnover had increased from R 110 million in 1979 to R 160 million in 1980.[29] A sharp rise in the price of basic foodstuffs and transport fares decided workers to demand an increase over and above what was contained in their wage agreement. In January 1981 workers at Elsies River downed tools. Management called in the riot police and after discussion agreed to consider the union's demands. Workers returned and sustained pressure on the company through an overtime ban.[30]

Management subsequently delayed negotiations which finally prompted 2000 workers on 14 May 1981 to down tools at the Blackheath and Elsies River plants. Despite union attempts to get workers back, they refused. As one worker explained, "Nine cents can't even buy a loaf of bread. The bosses eat our profits, they use our sweat and muscle - we will carry on striking until they give in."[31] After three days the company dismissed all strikers. Workers then issued the demand that employees be reinstated and that an immediate 25c an hour increase be granted to raise the minimum wage to R2 an hour.[32] Management broke off contact, employed replacement labour, and mobilised the press against strikers. The union immediately engaged in raising international support. Messages of solidarity and protest letters to the employers arrived from Sactu and a variety of overseas labour organisations; threats were made to black South African goods; and fellow British Leyland shopstewards embarked on industrial sabotage. This show of solidarity

served to reinforce workers' resolve in the first month of their strike. The union however made scant use of the media and thus lost the opportunity to win over public opinion or to regularly inform strikers of developments. Three weeks into the strike, when over 700 workers were out, Leyland issued a press statement announcing that production had normalised and only 500 workers had refused to return. Simultaneously the company placed large advertisements in local papers `thanking the community for its fantastic support`.[33]

Maybe whether deliberately or accidentally Leyland had touched on a sensitive issue. What the union was shortly forced to recognise was that in a situation of relative union isolation in the Western Cape, community support was too valuable a resource to be repudiated. After the uprisings in 1976, community organisations in the Western Cape had mushroomed. Coloured youth groups, women's organisations, SRCs and civic groups began to organise in black communities. The union leadership had viewed formal contact with community organisations with deep suspicion. It asserted that outside organisations should not dictate the union's actions and believed this was the price of community support for the Fattis and Monis strike and consumer boycott. As Foster explained, "If one takes what happened to the Food and Canning Workers Union in Worcester where the [Coloured] Labour Party eventually took over the bloody struggle, and here at Fatties and Monis where the union was prepared to reach an agreement with the company, and Hassan Howa of SACOS (SA Council of Sport) said no... you reach that stage because the union allows the thing to get out of hand."[34]

Once not congregated at work coloured members of Naawu were scattered as far as 100 kms from each other. Many isolated, desperate strikers read the negative press reports, and the threats by management that they would lose benefits, and returned to work at the beginning of June. Only as the strike was beginning to fade did Naawu realise the potential for community support and opened discussions with community organisations. The task entrusted to the community support committees was to prevent scabbing and to raise funds to support the remaining 500 strikers and their families. They collected over R 25 000, distributed pamphlets, provided food parcels and made public statements to ensure workers and the community were informed of developments. The Western Province Council of Sport called on its affiliates to `adopt a worker` and area committees were established in central places to allow workers and their support networks to meet. A number of community organisations however claimed that their organisations were weak and they needed to focus on their own issues before supporting workers. This lack of workers' support committees made it difficult to co-ordinate community support. Community groups attempted to deter scabs through direct approaches at factory gates, on trains, through door to door visits, pamphlets, and through an appeal at area meetings. The task was daunting owing to largescale unemployment but a number of scabs withdrew or joined the strikers.[35]

At the end of June, in the seventh week of the strike, 61 community organisations, churches and trade unions, endorsed a 'Leyland Support Week'. The week ended with a mass meeting attended by over 2 000 people at which Anglican Bishop Tutu lashed out at foreign companies and called on the British Ambassador to intervene. Naawu's vice president, Jack Dampies, commented on how much the union appreciated the community support, "The community have given workers a very, very great help and we believe in the future they will stand by workers ... they have got to stand together to make it a new and better South Africa for all workers."[36]

By the eleventh week of the strike support had receded. The remaining 520 workers began to feel desperate and a settlement had to be found. Ultimately the company agreed to re-employ all but one worker but no agreement on demands was reached. At the end of 1981 the two sides met at a Conciliation Board where Naawu won a minimum wage of R 1, 76 an hour.[37]

The Leyland strike was not a victory despite a defiant stand by workers and the community. It nevertheless had some important repercussions. An evaluation of the strike revealed the importance of community solidarity which had given an immense boost to Naawu. By 1982, 90 per cent of Leyland's 800 workers, had signed up to join the union. Naawu's General Secretary, Joe Foster commented, '...strikes are never lost. At Leyland you can say we lost in that we didn't achieve the objective of higher wages. But we won a helluva lot - people gained tremendous experience - not only the workers at Leyland but the community at large.'[38] The union learnt that it was foolhardy to isolate a factory struggle from the local communities where workers resided. In a perverse irony, which was consistent with the union's political stand, it had looked for support from workers' organisations thousands of miles away, and had ignored offers of community support on its doorstep. The Leyland strike taught Naawu the importance of mobilising all resources in support of a workers' struggle and of mobilising them without delay. As a result of the Leyland experience Naawu Western Cape emerged at the beginning of the 1980s as a militant democratic force, a far cry from the narrow, bureaucratic union it had been in the early 1970s. The strike reflected the process of democratisation and worker education which had taken place in the union over the previous ten years and Leyland workers were strengthened and politicised by the experience of their struggle. The union still viewed community involvement in an instrumental manner but its detachment from community involvement had finally been bridged.

Both Naawu and Mawu continued to link up with communities in a similar manner. The aim was to prevent the unemployed from scabbing through the conducting of educative activities, and by appealing for material support during prolonged strikes. A former Naawu Volkswagen shop steward Mbuyi Ngwenda recalls educating the community on the problem of `crossing the line`,

> I remember a strike where 109 workers were dismissed... So we used to have meetings in communities, and families would come in to understand, and people would join us in our

> picketing like the unemployed and family members... Picketing means mobilising the community to understand why you are taking particular action... You expose your management, and explain that once you cross the line it means that you are joining the other side, and it begins to say you're not part of us any more, and so you are becoming scab labour.[39]

It would take time before the nature of the relationship with local community organisation would shift. At this point the unions were demanding solidarity from community organisations but offering little support in return. Nevertheless these unions were beginning to acknowledge an interdependence between workers' different worlds - the world of work and the world of the township communities where they resided.

Debating alliances: 1982 -1984

For thousands of a-political workers in South Africa, conducting struggles in the union was their first experience of organisation and it extended their consciousness and expectations. Fantasia has remarked on this process, "As fighting trade unionists workers can be forced to see beyond themselves, and hierarchies and authority structures that are evident in the workplace can be revealed in the wider community, breaking down the sharp divide between work and community."[40] Mawu and Naawu's style of unionism had been vital to this process as workers were empowered to conduct and take responsibility for their own struggles within the holding confines of the union. Allen comments on how trade unions are important in permitting the experience of dissent, "The actual practice of trade unionism has an important bearing on the ability to dissent. The closer the trade union action is to the basic values of trade unionism then the more effective unions will be as vehicles for dissent. The unions are vital in this process because they alone amongst collectivities have the power to pursue and enforce dissent. They provide a protective forum for the discussion of dissenting views and a power base to enforce them..."[41] Lane et al talk of the impact that the act of striking has on workers, "A new dimension of living can be revealed to the striker; an existence of which 'ordinary' people are able to control events and command the attention of 'them'. The experience of this new reality can transform the striker's perceptions of normal life. What was 'normal' can no longer be regarded as 'natural'. Attitudes towards work and authority become critical as opposed to acquiescent."[42] It was in the manner described above that many Mawu workers transferred their experience of workplace dissent into the wider arena of dissent against authority which Mayekiso now referred to as `a movement of workers fighting for liberation`.

A protest in response to trade unionist Neil Aggett's death in detention on 5 February 1982 demonstrated this point. Two days after his death, the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), the General Workers Union (GWU) and Fosatu announced that their members would stage an half hour stoppage to protest police barbarity. The entire emerging union movement heeded the call. On Thursday, February 11 at noon, thousands of workers stood in silence next to their machines

from between one to thirty minutes. It was the first national stoppage in South African labour history. Ninety percent of workers who participated belonged to Fosatu unions, 53 000 in all. Most of these workers belonged to the textile and metal unions these being the only unions with working national structures. Employers took no action against them. Seifsa, for example, instructed employers to avoid dismissal and to dock pay for the period of the stoppage.[43]

The Aggett stoppage represented a critical transitional stage in trade union politics. To both Fosatu and the non-Fosatu Western Cape unions it underscored the need for worker and trade union unity. Among both groups it also led to a renewed scrutiny of the issues of alliances and politics. Both the FCWU and the GWU had become more reflective and conditional on the issue of community alliances after the problems they encountered in the Fattis and Monis and Red Meat boycotts.[44] After the failed meat boycott GWU's Lewis reflected on the necessity of joining forces with other labour formations to organise nationally `across an entire industry`.[45] Coming from the opposite direction Western Cape Naawu had likewise to engage with the issue. The Aggett stoppage in accelerating the rethinking that was already underway on both sides of the trade union divide and in underscoring the necessity for broader worker unity brought Fosatu closer to the GWU which claimed that `the stoppage taught us who our real friends were.`[46] More than this, it partially vindicated Fosatu's exclusive focus on building powerful shopfloor structures. It was unlikely that the newer unions, such as Macwusa and Saawu, who organised through mass rallies, could have mobilised its members at such short notice to take action in the factory. The Fosatu unions slow, determined organisation had revealed its power. It also demonstrated to community organisations that they had a potentially powerful ally in their struggle for change. Fosatu's reluctance to engage could no longer be justified. In a paradoxical twist however the success of the Aggett protest gave the Fosatu unions the confidence to further assert their position around the hegemony of organised workers in the struggle. In a speech to Fosatu's second Congress in April 1982 a few month's later Fosatu general secretary, Foster, spelt this out.

In essence, his controversial speech, asserted the terms on which Fosatu was willing to enter politics. It was the Federation's most strident assertion of an independent political stand. In part, it was an answer to the new community organisations, and general unions, some of which openly supported the ANC and its communist ally the SACP. Foster queried the contingent unity of the Aggett stoppage claiming that the way forward was to build disciplined unity with other unions, and not communities, in a `tight federation`. He proffered the structure of Fosatu as an example of such a federation. He argued that if unions took part in community struggles, they ran the risk of losing their working class leadership whilst simultaneously opening themselves to attacks from the state through leadership who were not accountable to workers. He queried the wisdom of organised labour, who had struggled to build their strength over a number of years, supplying leadership to newly formed community organisations who had little organised base. Moreover, community

organisations were subsumed under different political groupings and Fosatu was reluctant to divide the working class through a process of supporting some and not others. A more considered strategy, he contended, would be to build an independent working class movement to defend workers' interests, and to ensure their class concerns were not subsumed under other class interests. This was not an a-political stand. A worker's movement, Fosatu believed, should participate in a wider political struggle but whilst Foster praised the liberation movements, in particular the ANC, he emphasised that Fosatu unions would remain independent of political formations.[47]

This was a speech resonant with sub texts which were not lost on those to whom they were directed. In some quarters it was welcomed being Fosatu's first public commitment to engagement in the political arena. It committed its affiliates to the building of a working class movement through the mechanism of forging alliances and jointly campaigning with progressive community and political organisations. There were warnings however. Community organisations could not expect unreserved support, the conditions for workers' engagement would have to be negotiated. Unions would not participate in political activity which was not worker controlled and was `populist' in expression. To the `community ` unions Fosatu was extending a hand of friendship in its call for disciplined union unity although it was also making its standpoint clear. The state on its part was relieved to learn that these unions would not be seeking an alliance with the ANC. Nevertheless Foster was also seeking to inform the ANC and its labour wing, Sactu, of Fosatu's stance. Whilst acknowledging the historical role of the ANC in providing a home for anti-apartheid opposition forces Fosatu was deeply suspicious of the prevailing characterisation of South Africa, by both the ANC and SACP, as being one of `colonialism of a special type'. Through this theory the ANC aimed to recognise the racial structure of oppression in South Africa. This was interpreted by most as entailing a political strategy which encompassed a `two-stage revolution` whereby the first phase involved the struggle for a national democratic state and the second a struggle for a socialist South Africa.[48] Whilst recognising the diversity of views within the ANC, in Fosatu's analysis, the focus on the nationalist struggle took precedence in ANC thinking. Statements such as Thabo Mbeki's, "The ANC is not a socialist party. It has never pretended to be one, it has never said it was, and it is not trying to be. It will not become one by decree or for the purpose of pleasing its `left` critics." made Fosatu activists bristle.[49] In Fosatu's vision the black working class would play the leading role in a liberated South Africa and not become the pawns of petty bourgeois black nationalists. As Foster expressed it in his speech, "Political movements are often controlled by the `petty bourgeoisie` who fear genuine worker-controlled trade unions. They strive to dissolve worker-controlled movements into a mass political movement dominated not by workers, but by the petty bourgeoisie. According to them, the workers are only useful as a kind of battering ram they themselves seek to lead."[50] Foster's speech also continued an attack on the SACP which Fosatu did not view as being able to lead this working class movement for change. In

essence it regarded the SACP as having little independence from the dominant ANC or from the Soviet Communist Party orthodoxy which had uncritically endorsed Stalinism.[51]

Viewed in this manner, Foster's speech reflected a confidant, almost arrogant Fosatu which cocked a snook at the struggle traditions of both the ANC and SACP. It should be noted however that in early 1982 the ANC had not yet re-established its hegemony over the struggle which in the period between 1984 - 1986 it would dramatically and undisputedly assert. Secondly, Foster's speech is notable for its lack of specificity. No practical guidelines were laid down either in his speech or in policies adopted at the Congress on how this working class hegemony in the political terrain was to be realised. The political policy adopted was general in nature. Amongst others things the Congress committed its affiliates to fighting for universal suffrage, and rejected the homeland policy which stripped black South Africans of their citizenship. It stated its belief that the country's wealth must be democratically produced and equally shared and that it must actively work towards taking up struggles, and campaigns, for a better standard of living in communities where its members resided.[52] Workers were left to interpret Fosatu's socialist objectives as they wished. There was no programme to guide them. It is possible that the security situation in the country prevented an open debate of such aims but in reality Fosatu had not engaged its members in any systematic way on how it should seize socialist power nor had its leadership engaged in precise debate on how this would happen. An understanding existed that a violent revolutionary rupture was not being sought and that a gradualist mode was the preferred approach but beyond this no serious discussion on an alternative to the SACP took place. Its preference was for the open-ended spontaneity of social movement politics. As Erwin articulated, "We did not see them [the ANC] as an alternative. We were against vanguardism as a party, since we preferred a movement. We were arguing for a class orientation in politics. We needed organisation, beyond just mobilisation."[53] Yet the `movement` that Erwin referred to was still within the strictly confined limits of organised workers under worker leadership and was not yet the broadbased social movement that Giddens has defined as involving "a collective attempt to further common interests through collaborative action outside the sphere of established institutions."[54] Fosatu did not engage in `collaborative action` and removed itself politically leaving a large political vacuum which was quickly occupied.

The points raised in Foster's speech soon after took a concrete form in a debate that centred around the Fosatu unions' affiliation to the United Democratic Front (UDF). The UDF was launched in August 1983 at a mass rally attended by 12 000 people. Its aim was to unite `all our people wherever they may be... to fight for freedom.`[55] Its immediate objective was to fight the government's proposed new constitution and the Koornhof influx control bills. At its launch it had boasted 565 affiliates which included community, student, youth, women, and the community or general unions (later known as the UDF unions) such as Saawu, Gawu, and Macwusa. Following heated debate, Fosatu and a number of independent unions stayed out.[56]

Fosatu argued against affiliation on a number of grounds.[57] Firstly it claimed that the UDF's high political profile and its ANC sympathies would rapidly compromise the unions' security profile. Secondly it was concerned not to align itself to any particular political position contending that its membership came from a wide range of affiliations. Thirdly it expressed concern about the nature of the UDF's leadership which reflected a marked absence of worker leaders and whom, Fosatu argued, lent a petit bourgeois profile to the organisation. In consequence it asserted that workers would not feel comfortable in an organisation that did not reflect their style or interests. Fourthly, it argued that the UDF's quality of organisational democracy was poor and that control over the direction of the organisation and leadership accountability was absent. The UDF was a loosely organised front governed by the highest decision-making body, the General Council, to which each affiliate sent two delegates. Thus small organisations had the same power of veto over policy matters as a mass based trade union. Although some UDF regions established regional committees little communication took place with the base. Most affiliates did not require a paid up membership and it was thus impossible for grassroots organisations to control executive structures. Finally Fosatu believed that the UDF's programme was too general, unlike the concrete organisational goals articulated by trade unions. In essence Fosatu welcomed opposition to the government's new policies but it was not prepared to enter alliances that would dilute its socialist aims. It would mount independent campaigns which it hoped would complement the UDF's oppositional efforts.[58] In reality Fosatu itself had not developed a political programme but it was objecting to the popular nature of the UDF's politics and the absence of socialist sentiments expressed by the Front.

These arguments were contentious not only in the public domain but within Fosatu itself. Swilling pointed to fallacies in some of the independent unions' positions. He claimed that a large proportion of the UDF's leadership came from poor working class backgrounds, including many Africans, and that the demands of the struggle had made it impossible for them to become petty-accumulators. Seekings however points out that the initiative to form the UDF and its leadership in the early days came mainly from Indian and coloureds. "In Natal" he asserts, "the NIC (Natal Indian Congress)-dominated UDF leadership largely overlooked the African working class."[59] In the Transvaal the reconstituted Transvaal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Anti-SAIC (SA Indian Council) consisting of coloured and Indian leadership, and an African activist grouping mainly from Soweto who aimed to organise the African working class in the community rather than in the workplace, were behind the UDF's launch. The remainder of the PWV's black townships were unrepresented, in particular the East Rand, Pretoria and Vaal where union organisation was strong. Such UDF leadership although from working class backgrounds was "thoroughly urban , well-educated, upwardly mobile, and politicised through the BC movement and the churches."[60] Thus in the two regions were Fosatu was powerful, Natal and the PWV, the early UDF leadership had made little attempt to woo working class organisation and had thus

missed a critical opportunity. Swilling also contended that the UDF had long-term political aims which were encapsulated in the ANC's Freedom Charter which called for democratic liberties and which "involves the dismantling of the white capitalist power structures through a combination of nationalisation, land distribution and welfarism."[61] He further argued that as a Front the UDF had been established to oppose the government's new constitutional Bills and it was thus not a party with long-term political goals. Through its community affiliates however it had developed into `an urban social movement` which, he believed, was an important constituent part of the national liberation struggle.[62] Sisa Njikelana, Saawu's General Secretary, insisted that the culmination of the South African struggle in a socialist dispensation depended on the working class establishing hegemony within the UDF and the South African struggle generally. Abstentionsim made this impossible.[63] Within, and between, unions political labels were traded. Those against affiliation to the UDF were labelled `economist`, `workerist` and `ultra leftist`; whilst those in favour of an alliance were tarred with the `populist` brush. For some in the unions their political position had real consequences. Sipho Khubeka remembers, "In 1982, after my banning order expired, I applied to Mawu to work as an organiser. This matter was discussed in Fosatu, and it was agreed I should not be taken. I felt that Mawu was a strategic union. The ultra left were controlling Fosatu through Mawu. So if you got into Mawu, you were in a better position to put forward whatever politics you may have. But I did not get that chance."[64]

Mawu and Naawu's leadership was impervious to these arguments. At the time, Fosatu affiliates did not hold national AGMs. Thus Fosatu policy constituted affiliate policy on national concerns. Both Naawu and Mawu adopted the independent Fosatu position. Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of Mawu, speaking to 5 000 workers at the 1983 Mawu Transvaal AGM, for example, emphasised that the union was not involved in bread and butter issues alone, but was part of a broader struggle for liberation, "It is impossible to separate the two in South Africa when dealing with oppressed voiceless masses." He urged workers to build strong working class organisation, and to wage an independent struggle, "...workers as a class should fight their own problems. As the enemy is only one - capitalism - and all other things like influx control are merely appendages."[65]

Pursuing independent politics

In January 1983 the Nationalist government, pursuing its reform policies, introduced new constitutional proposals. These entailed the introduction of a three tiered government. Coloureds, Asians, and whites groupings would each legislate in separate parliaments whilst the ultimate power of veto would be held by the white legislature. Africans were excluded entirely as theoretically they wielded political power in their separate homelands. Initially whites would vote on an acceptance of this new constitution, followed by separate Coloured and Indian referenda. The independent labour movement and the UDF rejected the new constitution and launched separate campaigns. Despite overtures from the UDF to conduct joint activities to encourage

people to vote against the new dispensation, Fosatu launched an independent `No Vote' campaign, and challenged employers to oppose the new constitution on the basis of human rights and the demand for universal suffrage.[66]

Fosatu injected considerable resources and energies into the campaign in characteristically thorough manner. Over more than a year it sustained its opposition to the new constitution and continued to do so when in August 1984, under the slogan `Workers Unite - Don't Vote`, it campaigned against the tricameral elections after an affirmative result had been secured in the referenda. It distributed 80 000 pamphlets countrywide explaining its position and carried its crusade directly right into the factories. Workers affixed stickers over factory walls and thousands wore `One Man One Vote` stickers on their overalls. Some companies banned the stickers, and at metal factory, Kent Meters in Johannesburg, two workers were fired during the campaign. Reginald Pupazana complained that a manager approached him and tore a sticker off his overall. "I asked him why he was doing this. He then accused me of being a politician and of wanting to control the workers. I tried to show him that he must have some respect for the workers but he just said I must go out."[67] The irate manager informed workers that they should resign from Mawu forthwith as they were victims of a `political union`. He then burst in on Pupazana in the change room and fired him and a shopsteward.[68] Shopstewards countrywide approached managements to ascertain if the company supported the new constitution. Most managements avoided the issue and informed shopstewards that they were unable to adjudicate on political matters. Yet the Federated Chamber of Industries supported a `Yes` vote and waged a counter campaign to which many companies contributed financial resources.[69] The state too mobilised its propaganda organs and the SA Broadcasting Corporation waged an endless campaign calling on Coloured and Indian voters to exercise their democratic right. In this they were supported by almost every newspaper in the country.[70]

Naawu, in particular, in the highly politicised Eastern Cape, conducted an energetic campaign. It had the largest coloured membership in the metal sector and it was concerned to influence its coloured nationalist politics. Through the use of pamphlets, meetings, rallies, `Don't Vote` stickers, and door to door campaigning, it attacked the constitutional proposals as racist, undemocratic and anti-worker. Naawu officials[71] and factory floor leaders worked in shifts to conduct house visits to educate people in surrounding areas around the new constitution. Kettledas recalls, "We campaigned house-to-house. We covered 40 000 households in that campaign. Every afternoon from 5 o'clock after work we started campaigning until about 9 o'clock at night, Monday to Thursday, Saturday afternoons, Sunday afternoons."[72] Ever concerned to promote worker unity Naawu called on all workers to stand together against the constitution, and for coloured and Indian voters to boycott the elections and `unite with the great majority who do not have the vote.`[73] It attacked the coloured and Indian candidates, in the Labour Party, and Solidarity and National

People's Party, as stooges of the apartheid government. A Fosatu pamphlet read, "Where is the real change that these people say will happen? The fact is that racism is still the law of the land - we still have the Group Areas, Influx Control, the Immorality and Internal Security Acts."[74] Naawu's Les Kettledas spoke at a mass meeting of 4 000 people in Port Elizabeth immediately before the elections. The meeting was called by unions, community and church organisations. Despite the joint platform his speech retained Fosatu's distinct workers' approach,

> We see again attempts on another level to introduce apartheid. This we reject, as it is only through the unity of workers that our future will be safeguarded. And we will be able to successfully fight for a society where all people will be equal and where no-one will be oppressed and exploited - a society free from racist and capitalist exploitation. And in order to do this, worker power should be based on effective organisation at the point of production - in the factories, the shops, the farms and wherever workers are... The press must stop labelling anti-election organisations as boycotters. Name us what we are, the resistance, ... the resistance to capitalist and colonialist exploitation.[75]

Naawu's campaign had a dramatic impact on its coloured membership's consciousness. As a Naawu coloured worker remembers,

> I entered the union in about 1981. We were strong on factory floor issues, and we saw black [African] Macwusa people as having no knowledge of factory floor problems and being just politically minded. But we suppressed political involvement in politics. I was never involved in political discussion within the union like John Gomomo, Les Kettledas and Freddie Sauls. We were more conscious of the problems in the factory and fighting institutionalised apartheid on the factory floor - not on the broader political realm. We became more conscious when we had to campaign against the tricameral parliament.
>
> The campaign was educating workers on the shopfloor around the system and we were seen as coloureds being the dummies in this whole thing supporting whites against a black majority. We campaigned that coloureds were being used by whites. We had placards, pamphlets, graphics on how parliament would work, and we'd campaign in factory meetings and we also had community awareness programmes. From that time coloureds became very interested in the political spectrum but before that we were non-political. We would say we function as a trade union, within the framework of the constitution, and because we are non-racial we don't involve ourselves in political parties or party politics.[76]

Fosatu and Naawu's campaign undoubtedly contributed to the low polls in the referenda although an affirmative result was returned. In the Eastern Cape, for example, Kettledas claims that, "We brought their support down in that election - down to 30 per cent. So they went to parliament on a 30 per cent vote in the Eastern Cape, whereas previously they had 89 per cent."[77] Employers welcomed the affirmative result saying it would stabilise the political situation in South Africa. Fosatu responded cryptically, "The white referendum, on November 2 proved what we have always said - the nationalist government and business march side by side."[78]

Naawu's campaign clearly had an important impact in raising coloured voters political awareness. Yet it was divisive. Naawu waged its campaign independently of the UDF because, " ... the real and final target of the constitutional attack is workers and it will have to be workers who carry the

main burden of the struggle for political and economic liberation."[79] In practice however the UDF and Naawu were campaigning in much the same manner with the same message. As the Fosatu Eastern Cape Regional Committee commented, "...our message was the same but there were technical differences especially when it came to language, for instance, we stressed that the new deal `divides workers` whereas typically the UDF said that it `excludes people.`"[80] This comment may appear as a quibbling with words but Naawu in its independent style of organising was paradoxically the party furthering `the divide`. It was African community members who were the backbone of the UDF's support, although it certainly had some coloured supporters. Naawu was asking its coloured members to align themselves with the voteless African masses but it was not giving coloured workers the experience of conducting a joint political campaign, and hence the opportunity of identifying with African lack of citizenship through personal contact. It was also defining workers' interests in its narrowest dimension. The working class were the employed masses at the point of production without affiliations elsewhere in the society. Furthermore the working class unemployed and youth were excluded from the definition of those who could bring change and it was ironically these categories, in particular the youth, who were later to have a huge impact on the scale and intensity of the struggle against apartheid. In ignoring large sectors of the working class Naawu and Fosatu lost the opportunity to influence working class politics more broadly. Ultimately the concept of socialism, particularly amongst the youth, would remain at the sloganising level in township communities.

3. Beginnings of alliance politics: 1984-1986

Introduction

The years 1983 -1984 were watershed years for Fosatu and its affiliates. Mawu in particular was to undergo significant developments in its policies and approaches. As previously noted in Chapter 5, 1983 was the year that Mawu entered the metal Industrial Council, a decision that would be crucial in building the union's power in the industry. It was also a time for examining its isolationist politics. A division in its ranks in 1984 would become part of this process of realigning its politics. For Micwu too, 1984 was a significant year politically. It was in 1983 that it tabled, and lost, a political resolution at the Tucsa Congress opposing the tri-cameral parliament. Shortly afterwards Tucsa announced its support for these constitutional reforms and Micwu left the federation. It was to remain isolated until 1987.

The year 1984 also heralded an intensification of direct political challenge to the state. Numerous organisations embarked on a deliberate policy of destroying apartheid structures and replacing them with alternative forms of governance. By late 1982 black community struggles for better education and improved township facilities had moved to the Transvaal. The UDF, launched in August 1983, began an intensive campaign against government reforms which seriously

undermined the government's political programme and quickly positioned it as the dominant internal political opponent to apartheid.[81] Between 1984 and 1986 this political opposition embraced the ANC's call to make townships `ungovernable`.[82] By the end of 1983 thousands of students all over the Transvaal and Orange Free State had boycotted schools in protest against 'gutter education' and called for `People's Education for People's Power'. Their demand was broadly for an end to Bantu education but focussed specifically on the extensive use of corporal punishment in schools, the shortage of textbooks, and age limit restrictions on school attendance which particularly affected female students owing to the growing number of teenage pregnancies. This mobilisation was most intensive in the large clustered townships of the East Rand. By August 1984, for example, at least 29 schools in Katlehong were permanently on boycott and students were engaged in repeated street battles with police who responded with brutal attacks on protesting students using batons, teargas, birdshot, rubber bullets and at times live munition. In 1983 Cosas (Congress of SA Students) began to establish a presence in Katlehong. Cosas had been launched in 1979 to represent black school students on a national basis. It was a UDF affiliate which aligned itself with ANC goals and the struggle in the schools as part of a larger struggle against apartheid. By 1984, 556 Cosas activists were in detention and a number had died in clashes with the police and army.[83] Initially it struggled to gain support in East Rand townships but by 1984 it was acknowledged to be the pre-eminent youth and student organisation in the area.[84] Cosas brought the struggle for decent education into the heart of workers' homes. Workers as parents began to demonstrate growing support for their children's education struggle as they too entered and gained experience in union and community organisations. In addition by 1983 South Africa was in the middle of a recession. Unemployment, rising prices, low wages, squatter removals, lack of services in townships and Bantustans, the collapse of Bantu education, and rising rents were all issues with which workers were confronted.

Student struggles kindled other community struggles, the most significant being the township rent boycotts. These boycotts unfolded in the context of a rising cost of living and a resistance to Black Local Authorities (BLAs) which were created by the Community Councils Act in 1977 to replace the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards. The BLAs were managed by ineffectual, and often corrupt, black councillors who were deeply resented by the community and became the target of youth and community anger. These local authorities depended on rents to finance township infrastructure and when they increased rentals communities rose in resistance to challenge the entire system of local government. Struggles against BLAs became progressively more violent as community and youth organisations clashed initially with police, and later with the armed forces brought in to quell resistance. Councillors fled the townships, rents were not collected, and the local government system collapsed.[85] Residents responded to the UDF's call to build 'Organs of People's Power' and formed elected street committees, and 'people's courts' to replace 'apartheid justice' with 'people's justice'.[86]

The presence of the UDF in these struggles raised the profile of the ANC and brought the exile movement back to the centre of resistance politics. This was reinforced by a campaign of strategic bombings inside the country executed by the ANC's armed wing, Imkhonto we Sizwe. From 1984 a battle for political control of the townships was waged. Community members motivated consumer boycotts of white business to force the government to concede to their demands which included the removal of troops from townships and the granting of full political rights. By this time, the South African Defence Force (SADF) had occupied most townships as the country moved inexorably towards civil war. The mobilisation of the army reflected the mounting crisis in governance and the growing presence of the military in state affairs. When local authorities collapsed, the SADF activated the Joint Management Centres (JMCs), established in 1979 to regain control of townships, which were in turn linked nationally to the State Security Council directly accountable to the State President. JMCs co-ordinated strategies to quash boycotts and other forms of resistance through evictions, forced removals of entire communities, detentions and harassment of activists, closures of schools, and through the use of black vigilante groups whose activities fed into the state's propaganda campaign leading the media to refer widely to `black on black` violence.[87]

Numerous political and union activists were detained without trial and activists became the victims of intense state harassments, some of a chilling nature. Many were detained, tortured, went missing, were abducted from their homes, were shot at, and had their homes firebombed. At times the SAP departed from their public role to operate in more sinister undercover ways, doffing their police uniforms, and moving around in the cloak of night to intimidate and eliminate activists.[88]

It was against this background that Mawu faced an intensified internal political challenge which was first publicly articulated by a dissident group in its leadership that had emerged on the East Rand in 1983.

Divisions in Mawu

In June 1984 Mawu's NEC expelled four leading unionists. These were David Sebabi who until May 1984 had been general secretary, Andrew Zulu who was Mawu and Fosatu's Vice President, Sam Ntuli a Mawu organiser and chair of the East Rand People's Organisation (Erapo), and Enoch Godongwana an organiser and treasurer of the Mawu Transvaal Branch. The expulsions followed a year of infighting amongst organisers and the East Rand union leadership. At a meeting in July 1984 a dissident group launched a new union, the United Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of SA (Ummawusa) for which it claimed had 12 000 members on the East Rand as well as a number of mines.[89] Ummawusa immediately affiliated to the UDF and established a strong relationship with the `community` or `UDF` unions as they became known. The prime reason for

their expulsion was the charge that Sebabi and Zulu had utilised union funds for personal reasons.[90] The Ummawusa faction on its part had previously raised a number of grievances against Fosatu and Mawu's leadership, the most prominent being the lack of workers' control, the political direction of Mawu and Fosatu, and the role of white intellectuals in the union.[91] Ultimately the organisational significance of the split to the union was not great, although it sent shock waves through the independent labour movement at the time, and, according to organiser David Moedimeng, "...it took time for Mawu to consolidate"[92] Yet it held a number of lessons for the union's leadership and it denoted the beginnings of a new political phase in the union.

It was Sebabi who drove the split. Godongwana believes he and Ntuli became associated with Sebabi by default. In an attempt to deal with the infighting the NEC made a decision to divide the Transvaal branch into two separate branches (two sets of Transvaal delegates had arrived at an NEC in 1983) and allow factories to align themselves with whichever branch they wished. Godongwana was appointed branch secretary, and Zulu elected branch chair of the East Rand Branch where they worked with Sebabi who was an organiser in the area. It was thus that they became aligned with this faction. Nevertheless, they had their own grievances which Sebabi's antagonism to the other group allowed them to express. In addition Sebabi fuelled certain dissatisfactions they had not previously articulated.[93]

Ntuli and Gondongwa had emerged from the politics of community resistance on the East Rand before joining Mawu. In 1979 they had been instrumental in the formation of the powerful civic organisation, Erapo, which by the early 1980s was playing a leading role in the co-ordination of civic unrest across the East Rand and included in its membership workers, the unemployed, and petit bourgeois members of the community. Shopowners, shebeen and taxi owners, and civic organisations fell under its umbrella, and its reach encompassed branches in Springs, Daveyton, Boksburg, Wattville, Duduza and Tsakane. In 1983 Erapo affiliated to the UDF. Ntuli and Godongwana had thus entered Mawu in 1982 from a background of popular community struggle. Initially Godongwana felt comfortable with Mawu's politics and he found the introduction to socialist ideas in the union exciting. Mawu's emphasis on building strong factory organisation and its discrete politics he believed was appropriate. By 1982 however through discussion, reading and `looking at concrete conditions`, he had shifted his position to that of believing that the struggle for a national democratic struggle was the "correct scientific position...I became critical of Joe Foster's position, as if Fosatu was the beginning of the worker's movement."[94]

In 1983 the East Rand Administration Board embarked on shack removals in Katlehong. The Nationalist government had ceased providing housing and other infrastructure to townships since the 1960s in an effort to contain black rural migration into urban areas. By the early 1980s a

housing crisis existed in many townships including Katlehong. A proliferation of shacks and squatter settlements was the response. The proximity of Katlehong to the industrial areas of the East Rand made residence in this area desirable and thus workers and work seekers congregated in squatter settlements. The Katlehong Town Council's response was to attempt to stem the growing number of illegal entrants and shack erections through a blanket policy of shack demolition. In the first seven months of 1983, 68 000 people lost their shack accommodation.[95] Shack demolitions were experienced as a direct attack on migrant workers. The issue was raised and discussed in the Katlehong Shopstewards Local. Mayekiso recalls that, "With the establishment of shopsteward councils there was discussion on many issues because workers would ask deeper questions, deeper than just around issues of wages and conditions of employment and many issues came up like issues of housing, conditions in the townships and township politics, apartheid issues. They were linking issues and it was becoming pure politics now."[96] Godongwana recalls Taffy Adler, Fosatu's Transvaal Regional Secretary, discouraging direct union action in resisting these removals and the Fosatu Regional Executive Committee ruled against the Katlehong Shopstewards Council taking such steps. The Federation's decision to remain distanced angered him.[97] The issue provided an opportunity for shopstewards to enter township politics in direct defence of fellow migrant workers. They were confused by Fosatu's espousal of socialist solidarity combined with its reluctance to act in defence of besieged workers. Godongwana's disappointment resonated with workers who lived in these areas. A shopsteward who joined Ummawusa argued that,

> The situation of workers in South Africa is that they are oppressed and exploited. The struggle goes beyond the factory gates. Workers must address themselves to the problem of rents, shacks, electricity tariffs, schools, recreation. In Fosatu and Mawu workers have been openly discouraged from taking up these issues and political organisations have been openly criticised. We recognise that trade unions are not political organisations. But for them to say no politics in trade unions is nothing else but to keep their politics of reformism inside the trade unions.[98]

It was here that a complexity of different political approaches and resentments against white union intellectuals fused. The Ummawusa dissidents believed that white officials were obstructing the forging of union alliances with community groups. This played into unarticulated resentments around the domination of white officials in policy matters in the union which Sebabi brought into the open. The dissident group claimed that "a tiny white bureaucratic elite tries to dominate the whole federation. They are trying to direct the federation towards their direction rather than letting the workers decide."[99] Mayekiso believed that this faction employed the racist argument dishonestly, "Racism was not a factor in the union, it was a factor in corrupt individuals. A typical example was around Bernie [Fanaroff] working with the racist regime, `Here is a man from Pretoria`, which was a total lie. So workers don't know if it's true or not but he's white anyway so what does he want here. It was not a factor in the union generally but at that particular point in the split it became an issue against certain white people..."[100] Godongwana agrees that Sebabi "used these sentiments as a cover for the investigation [around his corruption]. Little did we know that

Sebabi indeed is corrupt and jumping on the bandwagon, was in fact exploiting the East Rand Branch sentiments... Sebabi knew these sentiments and utilised them to his benefit, and hid behind these sentiments."[101] Yet Sebabi had tapped into a real grievance. At the time Godongwana claims that he and Ntuli felt marginalised by a dominant group of white intellectuals. They had been excluded from a crucial staff meeting to discuss divisions and were not members of the NEC. He claims it was only at the point of expulsion that he learnt of Sebabi's corruption. He believes that white intellectuals made an important contribution to building the union but that black leadership experienced their superior skills as having the effect of "taking your independence - in Xhosa `isithunzela`."[102] Thus complex racial politics were at play and Fosatu's refusal to enter community politics where Ntuli and Godongwana were knowledgeable and strong added to this sense of disempowerment. Buhlungu believes that the split brought issues of race and power into the open in the union and contends that race was an `highly explosive issue within Numsa and its predecessors `.[103] He quotes Mayeksio in this regard, "At some stage it (race) was ignored, but not that it was not existent… It's not that people were not understanding that there was a race problem…You tended to depend upon these people (umlungu/whites). You don't want to lose them, you don't want to lose their skills… 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.`[104] Yet how important was the race issue in the union at this point?

It could be argued that Buhlungu over simplifies the issue. As previously quoted, Mayekiso elsewhere asserted that `Racism was not a factor in the union`[105] Whilst it clearly was a factor, Mayekiso's own ambivalence about its importance probably signals that it was not `as highly explosive` as Buhlungu would have it. Racism was clearly an important issue for certain black leaders and these individuals would chiefly be those who had an interest in power and a concern to influence the ideological direction of the union. As Mayekiso comments of white intellectuals, "The intellectuals, okay, intellectuals in the sense of degrees… five years in university, seven years…They spent time reading …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 shopsteward, he just wanted to organise against the brutal treatment by the bosses."[106] Later, as organic black working class leadership began to emerge it too had an interest in power and the leverage to influence the union's direction. The acquisition of power was thus a strong factor in the contestation that unfolded. It should be noted that such internal contestation over the political and ideological direction of organisations who have the potential to wield power are, and have been, a worldwide phenomenon regardless of racial politics. It should also be noted that in the Mawu/Numsa case black organic intellectuals were confronting unusually strong and intellectually able white intellectuals who would have posed a challenge to most educated whites. Disempowered blacks were thus confronting abnormally strong and intellectually endowed individuals. These white intellectuals often played a mentoring role as they passed on their skills

and contacts and it is natural in any mentoring relationship for the mentored to need to move beyond the relationship. Thus it was that emerging black worker leadership desired to separate and assert its independence. Such separation can be painful. It may be argued that it is to the credit of both white and black intellectuals in Mawu that strong black leadership did emerge and that the tenets on which the union rested , democracy and workers control, had permitted this. Buhlungu's interpretation that worker leaders surfaced despite `the fact that some of the white officials limited the scope for emergence of worker leaders`[107] may be too negative.

What is remarkable is that in the brutal racially divided society in which these unions operated, a high degree of unity of purpose and action existed between blacks and whites in the union. Thus rather than describing the unions' racial politics as `highly explosive` I would characterise it, in the main, as `creatively contained`. This is not to deny that the racial dimension, which was acutely felt by particular powerful and astute black leadership, did not at times spill over into destructive consequences for the union of which the split in Mawu is an example. Moreover in the future, racial tensions would contribute to Numsa discarding important democratic structures, and may also have contributed towards the downfall of Numsa president, Maxwell Xulu (these examples are explored in later chapters). The racial tension also however at times led to positive outcomes for the union. This was demonstrated for example by June-Rose-Nala who reacted to the dominance of white male intellectuals by harnessing the skills she had acquired in working with them and removing herself to Northern Natal to ultimately build, in co-operation with Richards Bay communities, a strong Mawu branch.

According to Godongwana, neither he nor Ntuli ever envisaged the creation of a splinter union. They believed that the conflict would be resolved through some form of mediation but miscalculated on the levels of antagonism[108] that the split had generated. Commented Godongwana, "It was political immaturity on both sides".[109] After the expulsion Alec Erwin explained to Godongwana that they were forced to expel he and Ntuli because " `... we've already established a principle when we fired [Calvin] Nkabinde ... the principle of a split is established in Fosatu. You've got a case some of you but because you've created a splinter union and that's the real reason why we're going to fire you guys, no other reason.` I accepted his explanation..."[110]

What was the significance of the split for the union's politics at the time? White intellectuals who owned skills and had access to tertiary education had played a large role in the direction and policy formulation in Fosatu in the early 1980s. Fanaroff believed that when Mawu grew rapidly in the early 1980s, sound democratic structures to control the power of officials had partially broken down. After the defeat at Scaw Metals, which was accompanied by the deepening recession, workers started to depend on the experience of officials and leading shopstewards. Fanaroff believed that the split in Mawu was important in highlighting the erosion of workers' control,

> It has been difficult to develop proper democratic structures. We outgrew our resources, and didn't develop the structures to facilitate our rate of growth. Also there is no real tradition that organisers are controlled by the BEC in the Transvaal. Each organiser can do his own thing.
>
> It is encouraging though that over the last year the shopstewards have realised that they must control the union in the Transvaal. If we contrast Transvaal and Natal, it's clear that in Natal workers, rather than organisers, control the union. Workers discipline the organisers and make them accountable. As a result they won many victories, and have developed a very stable leadership. And this is only because the BEC in Natal controls organisers.[111]

Fanaroff's comments were borne out by the fact that Mawu's national leadership had emanated from Natal for some time, although it was a much smaller and less central branch than the Transvaal. Bobbie Mare commented that, "The political leadership in Mawu and Numsa in Transvaal has been always very weak... so the leadership came from Natal. There wasn't a president from the union here [Transvaal]. There was Madoops [David Madupela], a Vice President, always second to Max [Xulu]. They [Transvaal] could've taken the leadership when they wanted to but they couldn't surface people."[112] The divisions in the Transvaal had flowed largely from differences between officials and not members. The union came to the realisation that it could not claim workers' control just because workers from the shopfloor were elected into official positions. The grip of officials decided the extent of workers' control. A recognition existed that workers` control was not a fixed entity but something for which the union had continuously to struggle. It was a reminder too that issues of union democracy became more complex as the organisation expanded.

Moedimeng recalls that, "Members were confused about which group was correct."[113] Yet, despite Fanaroff's reflections on the domination of officials, a tradition of vigorous debate was still very much alive in the union. Mayekiso describes how shopstewards responded,

> ... the shopstewards were participating, challenging the officials, challenging on politics, and working conditions' issues and so on. And that was vibrant, and that is a tradition that Numsa must be proud of... Like in the period of the split, officials would be chucked out and workers would debate. In fact that was a good lesson that shopstewards and the leadership in Numsa have learnt from that time, that a debate is a debate, it doesn't have to mean a split.[114]

In hindsight Godongwana reflects that the mere fact that the issue of resentment against white intellectuals did emerge was evidence of a lively ethos of debate and criticism,

> The fact that this thing manifested in Mawu reflects some degree of flexibility and openness. You couldn't do that in the textile union...despite all I have said, the degree of freedom, the degree of pluralism, the degree of tolerance in the labour movement is stronger than anywhere else. The thing happened in Numsa [Mawu] precisely because we had not reached the level at which we could be able to manage pluralism effectively... Everything was a lesson. Even in the split we learnt about political tolerance."[115]

Even under stress the union was demonstrating a tradition of open debate that allowed for the emergence of conflict which in most cases, except this, as the union matured, its participants were able to contain. Erwin expresses the view that there were surprisingly few splits in a large organisation like Numsa, and the tendency was more towards unity than fragmentation. He believes its focus on building organisational power was critical in this,

> In fact there were very few splits or open conflict in Numsa basically because of its strong union base with the recognition that at the end of the day power gets built by organisation and not by talking so the organisational imperative of marshalling your forces overrode your immediate interests and divisions...so if you survive you only survive because your organisational capacity is great. Good leadership strengthens the process but it doesn't make the process...In the Fosatu unions the basic strategy that leadership took was always argue off a base of power and power is only the ability to deliver and this was certainly crucial for Cosatu's current power.[116]

Although Mayekiso asserts, "That the split was over corruption it was not over politics"[117] this is too simplistic. Ummawusa's political position clearly struck a powerful chord with some membership. It was also evident that in the process of the intense debate that the split had engendered, a broader and more complex working class politics had developed amongst membership and leadership. Black leadership had found the confidence to assert its own politics supported by memberships' lively engagement in community political issues in the shopstewards councils. The divisions had focussed an alternative approach to political engagement that Mawu was now forced to confront. Officials were beginning to realise that Mawu's abstentionism was no longer an appropriate response to a crisis situation in townships and the dissatisfactions that emerged in the split would render them more responsive to the demands of the political context in the future. The formation of a splinter union had shaken Mawu and Fosatu's leadership as their socialist politics had always emphasised the importance of worker unity. Such divisions strengthened their resolve to work towards unity in both the labour movement and in the metal sector. In an irony it was Godongwana's outsider status and affinity with his former union, Mawu, coupled with his desire to return to the fold, that drove him to bring the UDF community unions into negotiations that led to the establishment of Cosatu, and Numsa, and thus to the strengthening of these formations.[118]

Shifting politics

Forging alliances: 1984 stayaway

The 1984 Transvaal stayaway is commonly viewed as a decisive shift in Fosatu and Mawu's style of politics.[119] While there is truth in this, the extent of the shift has probably been overemphasised. It was certainly an historic moment in Fosatu's political history as it was for the first time engaging in region-wide political action in alliance with community and student organisations. It would however probably be more accurate to view it as a step in the evolution of Mawu/Numsa's political development. As will become evident, engagement by union members in stayaway

activities had been firmly established by the time of the 1984 stayaway. National or branch executives of Mawu may not have officially endorsed these actions but workers, and in some cases Mawu and Fosatu leadership on the East Rand, were already widely committed to observing them. Viewed thus, the 1984 stayaway does not appear as the `sharp break`[120] referred to by commentators. Fosatu leadership were in effect rubber stamping a de facto situation and an inevitability. It should also be noted that the union demonstrated an ambivalence to this mode of political participation after the euphoria around the success of the action had receded. The stayaway did however mark a shift in the Federation's one-sided instrumental approach to community politics. It responded for the first time to a community/student request for support rather than the established pattern of obliging external organisations to support factory struggles. It was evident in the preparation for the stayaway however that Fosatu was still very much in control of the action and students were obliged to play second fiddle to labour's superior mobilising power. The move to a commitment to more longstanding alliances was a slow process of which the launch of Cosatu in December 1985 was part. The Fosatu culture of independent separatist politics was immediately diluted on the emergence of Cosatu which, in the interest of worker unity, welcomed the `UDF unions` into its ranks. Cosatu identified openly with the national liberation struggle soon after its launch when a delegation visited ANC headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia. A joint ANC /SACP /Cosatu statement emanating from this meeting declared Cosatu `...as an independent organisation and as an essential component of the democratic forces in our country."[121] The preparations for the formation of Cosatu also saw a diminution of tensions between the populist and syndicalist traditions as the push for unity was actively promoted in the regions by both Fosatu and the UDF unions.

The year 1984 was marked by the widespread use of the stayaway tactic by various communities. Fosatu, as the most unionised group, was inevitably approached for its support in such actions. Towards the end of 1984 three large communities in the Transvaal called on workers to stay away from work in support of student and community demands. These were the Vaal, the East Rand and Soweto. In the case of Soweto, which was not situated adjacent to a major organised industrial area, Fosatu shopstewards' involvement in planning stayaway action was limited. In the Vaal and on the East Rand however shopstewards had developed good relations with community and student resistance organisations. Inevitably Mawu, including both membership and leadership, as the largest and most organised union in these areas, played a prominent role.

In the Vaal in early 1984, the Lekoa Town Council announced a R5,95 a month rent increase. This was the highest township rental in the country. The Vaal Civic Association and Fosatu's local shop stewards council jointly decided on a rent boycott which was to be accompanied by a call for a one day protest stayaway from work on 3 September. The stayaway was well observed in all the Vaal townships but in particular in Sharpeville where 60 per cent of workers remained at home.

Militant youth patrolled the streets in an attempt to enforce the stayaway and violent clashes with police resulted.[122] At least 32 people died. Mawu's Petrus Tom recalls,

> Everybody was at home. There was nobody who was at work that day, on the third day of September. The children made roadblocks... Early in the morning I was told by my children that there were a lot of children with banners saying everyone must go to the offices. They were singing.
>
> I went to see what was happening. I was told that the children had taken my child also... I found the hippos standing at the administration offices, together with the soldiers with television cameras. They were blocking the people from getting to the administration board offices. They said we could send delegates to talk with them, not all the people.
>
> People were delegated by these children to go and demand that we pay R30 rent no more... The older people advised the children that it was dangerous to confront these people because we know what happened in 1960 when we were facing the police like this and they opened fire. They might open fire again. The children said, 'No, this is not 1960 this is 1984. You can't talk about what happened in 1960. What we are doing now is different from that.'
>
> That day the shops were looted. Everybody was taking anything they liked from the shop. The police didn't do anything about that. All they did was shoot rubber bullets. Some were looted at night, some during the day. At our Sharpeville market people were saying it was the police who came there first, broke in and took cold-drinks and cigarettes, and left the market open. They said the children came afterwards and also took those things.[123]

Two weeks later the Release Mandela Committee (RMC) called a stayaway in Soweto to show solidarity with Vaal residents, and to protest police violence in the townships. About 65 per cent of workers observed the stayaway and three young people died in clashes with the police.[124] This was followed in October by a third Transvaal township stayaway in KwaThema, Springs. This action was significantly to involve Mawu and Fosatu leadership and was to influence its decision to support the November 1984 Transvaal stayaway.[125]

In the struggles that developed within Fosatu over its political policies, the Fosatu Springs Shopsteward Council was to play a significant role. Godongwana who had served on the executive of the Katlehong Shopstewards Council assisted shopstewards in KwaThema, the Springs township, to establish the Springs Shopstewards Council. It was to permit broad attendance, including that of retrenched workers and representatives of the unemployed, "We never accepted that retrenched workers could no longer be union members."[126] recalls Godongwana. The Council formed close links with Erapo. Every fortnight a meeting of Erapo which was attended by shopsteward council representatives, convened.[127]

In the Springs local, Mawu's politics of deferalism was attacked by the Sebabi group, and by Chris Dlamini who was on the executive of another Fosatu affiliate, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU). SFAWU's relationship with the youth on the East Rand had developed owing to students' active support during a boycott of Simba-Quix products in August 1984 when the

company fired its entire unionised workforce. During the schism in Mawu the Springs Shopstewards Council permitted both factions to attend, and changed its name to the East Rand Workers Council where it strengthened its relationship with Erapo. Godongwana believed that the presence of union activists in Erapo was important for building strong grassroots organisation. The worker politics of these union activists influenced Erapo and here Godongwana believes a fusion of Fosatu's socialist and Erapo's populist approaches occurred. Union activists also adopted Mawu's cautious approach to exposing union leadership to the actions of the state through the considered development of an alternative layer of leadership in Erapo. Godongwana recalls,

> I must be honest, the whole idea of class analysis came through those discussions with Mawu, because of the emphasis on the question of class. That also shaped my thinking. It influenced Erapo in that we discussed the nature of our struggle in our country. And injecting working class practices in Erapo - having proper structures, mandates, recall - those are working class practices. And looking at the nature of the society we want to create...

:

> At the same time, the influence of the trade unionists became dominant in Erapo. Most of us decided not to be at the executive level ...because we wanted leadership to grow in the structures while we are assisting in building the structures and shaping the direction of Erapo... There is a problem of cross leadership, for example in Duduza, where most of the guys on the executive of the civic are shopstewards and members of the shopsteward council. Experience has taught us that ... if the state moves in it smashes two organisations at the same time. In Duduza most of our shopstewards are in detention.[128]

A cross fertilisation took place however. Factory leadership in Erapo were also being exposed to township politics and thus the Congress tradition was progressively filtering into the unions. Through this exposure factory and union leadership began to engage actively in township political struggles where there was a weak UDF presence. It was this mutual interaction that led to the formation of the KwaThema parents/students committee in 1984 which was facilitated by the Springs shopstewards council at a meeting attended by 4 000 Kwa-Thema residents. Dlamini played an important role on the committee which included local Azapo leaders, unionists, and ANC sympathisers.[129] Many parents were Mawu and Ummawusa members. The Springs Council also introduced the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) to the KwaThema youth.[130]

The parents/students committee drew up a series of demands to direct at the government. These included, amongst others, the election of democratic student representative councils, major reforms to the system of Bantu education, and the removal of the army and police from township life. The government ignored the demands and the parents-students committee decided on a local stayaway on 22 October. In a powerful protest 80 percent of workers in the area stayed away from work. The SFAWU and the African Food and Canning Workers Union were largely responsible for organising this impressive workers' support. Mawu, however still hung back. It was the success of the Springs stayaway however that according to Dlamini, was decisive in ensuring Fosatu's official support for the November stayaway.[131]

On October 27 Cosas called a meeting in Johannesburg which was attended by 37 organisations including unions such as Mawu, youth congresses and community organisations. Cosas urged unions to show solidarity with student demands and preferred the idea of a Transvaal stayaway. At the meeting union representatives were unanimous in adopting the view that Bantu education was a workers' problem. It was impossible, they contended, for workers comfortably to attend work while their children were dying in the streets. In attendance were also workers who had participated in the 1976 protests against Bantu Education who recalled their parents lack of support for their actions. A former Mawu shopsteward recalls that, "The parents would hit us. I was at school at the time. My parents said when we came home, `No you're not allowed to come here at home. You are naughty, you must go to school.` They don't know exactly the effect of Bantu education... I think there is no link being made. We must tell all the workers and shopstewards what is happening outside the factory."[132] Dissent over what form the protest should take emerged and a consumer boycott was mooted instead of a stayaway in response to heightened state repression following the Springs stayaway. Finally however a two day stayaway was agreed.[133] It was also decided that student demands should be broadened to include worker and community grievances. The main demands settled on were for the election of democratically constituted Student Representative Councils, the withdrawal of the army from townships, an end to police harassment, and the withdrawal of rent and bus fare increases.[134] The meeting nominated a four-member committee to co-ordinate the stayaway. Mawu's general secretary Mayekiso was one of the members.[135] He had been slower than Dlamini to commit Mawu to an alliance with students, but he became convinced it was the correct strategy,

> The youth came to me and asked to meet with the executive of Fosatu which I arranged. It is natural in an organiser to be more cautious, you can't send workers to the guillotine, they've got to win what they are fighting for and advancing their struggles. I was convinced that the stayaway around students' issues was the right route to go. You couldn't kick workers away from those matters when school kids were clamouring for support.[136]

The Central Committee of Fosatu which had met on the 21 October was had agreed `to support the students in their demands and also mandated the representatives from the Transvaal to represent Fosatu on the stayaway co-ordinating committee.`[137] A Fosatu sub-committee was created to monitor the stayaway and union leadership, shopstewards and locals were mandated to report back to members. The unions primarily targeted migrant hostel dwellers who constituted the bulk of their membership and activists distributed 400,000 pamphlets explaining the stayaway. Cosas students covered the schools.[138] The stayaway committee formally announced the demands and sent a telegram to the government. A deafening silence followed.[139] The stayaway was confirmed.

On November 5 the police maintained a low profile as the stayaway was too widely observed for the state to counteract. At least 800 000 workers stayed home on both days, and the Vaal and the

East Rand witnessed an 80 per cent observance. In unionised plants 90 per cent of workers stayed away.[140] Township and hostel workers participated. The stayaway in Atteridgeville township (adjacent to Pretoria), was almost total except for homeland people who attended work. A similar pattern emerged in Brits where township workers supported the stay-away, but unorganised workers from homeland villages clocked in for work. In schools across the Transvaal about 400 000 students stayed away.[141]

It was thus that for the first time since the 1950s that unions formally endorsed a stayaway. Employers were surprised by the scale of worker absences but distanced themselves viewing it as a political matter that had little to do with them. Most employers deducted two days wages. Some businessmen started talking of the need for talks with the ANC. The state's response was uneven. It embarked on the mass dismissal of some 5 500 workers at its parastatal Sasol which was organised by Fosatu's CWIU. Thereafter members of the co-ordinating committee were detained and charged under the Internal Security Act. Mayekiso was arrested before dawn in his Alexandra township house and held in solitary confinement for a month. Charges were dropped six month's later in April 1985.[142] The state evidently viewed the stayaway as the work of a small group of agitators bent on using the unions for political ends. The Minister of Manpower announced that the stayaway was planned by a sinister group using the `lowest, most undemocratic and unchristian tactic.`[143] Security police searched Fosatu's Germiston offices and took photographs and names of people working there.[144] Yet aside from the large numbers of dismissals at Sasol, Fosatu had emerged fairly unscathed. This was the moment it had anticipated for years when the state would move against the union movement, as it had with Sactu, and crush it. Far from its worst nightmare being realised it had executed an enormously successful action.

The stayaway was significant for a number of reasons, even though its demands were not met by the state. Here was widespread solidarity action involving unions, students and community groups which as Lodge expressed it, "... underscored the critical role of factory-based organisations in any effective form of sustained political resistance."[145] In contrast to the two day stayaway in August 1976 where hostel dwellers in Soweto resisted black student calls to observe the action , migrant workers clearly stayed away. In 1976, after provocation from students and the burning of Meadowlands Hostel, Zulu migrant workers had gone on the rampage and in a battle between Soweto township residents and migrants, 35 were killed and 350 injured over a three day period.[146] In 1984 no significant differential was observed between the participation of migrant and township dwellers and in some migrant-dominated factories a 90 percent absence was noted.[147] At the time Mawu also believed that it had forged the possibility of much wider worker solidarity. It had connected opposed political groupings in the Transvaal that had not co-operated before. This included union, community and political formations. Fanaroff commented, "From there, because it was the most powerful stayaway in years, there was recognition on both sides that we had to work

together. On the side of the ANC and Azactu [the black consciousness Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions] and on the side of Fosatu - realisation that we had to start co-operating together."[148] Co-operation with Azactu (later to merge into Nactu) continued however to be patchy although evidence emerged that Azapo-affiliated workers had supported the stayaway despite the Confederation's lack of support.

Lambert et al[149] believe that through the endorsement of a broad regional stayaway Fosatu had placed the national democratic struggle firmly on the agenda and that it had inevitably brought the Fosatu unions closer to the ANC and its allies. They posit that this was the re-emergence of political unionism in the trade union movement. This interpretation echoes Ginsberg's description of early Mawu as non-political. For Lambert et al unions fall into two categories namely orthodox unionism or political unionism. It is erroneous, however, to describe Mawu as non-political in the sense that Tucsa unionists defined themselves. Firstly Mawu's style of organising had a profoundly politicising effect on members who would later make direct links to the world of resistance politics. Workers' political understanding grew through their participation in democratic structures and factory struggles. An Alusaf shopsteward remarked,

> The trade union struggle has political significance. Some people used to bow when they see white people saying `baas, baas'. But we have changed this attitude now and everybody, if he's a man, he's a man. I think this is a political thing. They don't feel victims of the nation any more. Although they know that these people have got money, and are wealthy, the workers have managed to erase the slave from themselves by not bowing to anybody.[150]

It was through successful struggles at work that workers began to understand the possibility of challenging their oppression in their communities and in the wider society. Mawu organiser Peter Dantjies recalls,

> The community saw that as a result of union activity there was a change in the workplace in terms of salary and conditions. People saw there is power behind the trade union movement, and workers saw we changed this and this in our factory, why can't we change things in the area where we live. So it was easy to translate factory victories to community issues.[151]

Secondly Lambert et al tend to view political engagement in the narrowest sense of identification with political parties or political formations. Alliance politics is essentially what they view as constituting political unionism. Mawu had begun to play a political role in communities some time prior to the November 1984 Transvaal stayaway. It is true these were communities where Mawu's politics was not contested and where other political formations, such as the UDF and Azapo, were not operative or were weak. Nevertheless Mawu shopstewards and national office bearers were providing the leadership for the initiation of local resistance politics in places such as Brits, Springs, Empangeni and Alexandra Township in Johannesburg and the union was willing to identify with such activities which were clearly involved in advocating systemic change.

Thirdly, Mawu's aim, as previously advanced, was profoundly political. Its goal was the attainment of a socialist state. Its apparent tardiness in revealing its politics was more of a question of timing and mode of engagement. It was a social movement in waiting as Mayekiso expressed it, "We were paving the way to get involved in politics."[152] The exile organisations' disfavour (especially ANC and Sactu) would not have been provoked if they had not viewed Fosatu and its unions as a rival for hegemony in the South African political struggle. As it was, external pressures overtook Mawu's attempts to control the pace of engagement in large urban communities and its township membership forced it into overt political action. Mawu had always defined its goals as political but it was only in 1984 that it publicly identified itself with a particular political persuasion through the forging of an alliance. As previously argued, Lambert et al tend to define politics in terms of alliance politics. They suggest that Mawu and Fosatu only engaged in political unionism when they *publicly* aligned themselves with South Africa's resistance organisations, in particular those associated with the Congress tradition. For a period however, the possibility of Fosatu developing alternative alliances and forms of political engagement, existed. Fosatu however failed to develop a distinct programme for the achievement of its socialist goals. It should be noted though that in 1984 Fosatu and its affiliates did not necessarily see themselves as moving towards an inevitable alignment with the Congress Movement. The success of the stayaway provoked contradictory responses in Mawu and Fosatu. Whilst Fanaroff believed it had brought the union closer to the ANC, to other Fosatu leaders such as Naawu's Foster, it demonstrated that only organised workers had the power successfully to stage significant political action. This served to confirm their `workerist` view that only through the power and leadership of the organised working class could meaningful change be wrought. Fosatu had been able to preserve its independence whilst forging an alliance with township organisations over an agreed period of time, with agreed objectives, after which the alliance was terminated. For this group the stayaway confirmed its belief that it was possible for the labour movement to play a political role but to remain independent of political parties and formations. It should also be noted that this group's qualms about the UDF's assertion that a socialist order depended on whether a working class socialist position managed to establish hegemony in the Front, held substance.[153] In a 1985 interview, the UDF's leadership commenting on the stayaway, asserted that it was `possibly the most significant campaign of the year' but made no mention of the fact that its success was due to Fosatu's tight factory organisation.[154] Based on political bias both parties were reluctant to acknowledge the others contribution.

It is important to highlight too that not all significant black political formations drew closer to Fosatu as a result of the stayaway. Inkatha attacked the action and Mangosuthu Buthelezi perceiving the possibility of his Zulu migrant support base being eroded, claimed that workers' had been intimidated into participating.[155] Little evidence of intimidation however emerged. The

success of the stayaway generated enormous excitement and political confidence amongst membership. The power of the stayaway tactic as a form of non-violent protest which simultaneously attacked the heart of the economy was demonstrated to them. The unions' tactic of building strength at the point of production was also revealed as a powerful weapon in the political struggle. Finally the stayaway demonstrated that the struggle for freedom could be won from within the country and that workers did not have to passively to depend on the actions of exiled organisations. Commented a former Northern Transvaal Mawu shopsteward, "The unions were a university and the ANC and PAC were banned at the time and the only major voice of the people was the unions."[156] This knowledge would drive forward the workers' struggle for liberation.

Uneven political responses

The following months brought an uneven response to engagement in alliance politics on the parts of both Mawu and Naawu. Stories of the success of the Transvaal stayaway spread and pressures on Fosatu unions to engage in political action were great. Yet Fosatu appeared almost afraid of the power it could harness and the responsibility it now carried in the national liberation struggle. In densely packed urban areas, where the UDF was strong, Mawu and Naawu's relationship with community politics was complex. A potential contestation was underway for political hegemony which concerned different visions of what political path should be pursued and the style of attaining it. It was not however a battle in which Fosatu was to engage. It was in the space created by Fosatu's hesitation that the militant township youth assumed the major role in township resistance politics.[157] This was augmented by the ANC calling for the creation of ungovernability in the townships in early 1985.[158] The Fosatu unions did however take the lead in community politics where the UDF was weak or non-existent and thus the question of alliances was not pertinent. Mawu however was particularly active in this regard. Shopstewards frequently assisted in the establishment of community organisation and often assumed leadership roles.

The 1984 Transvaal stayaway was followed in December by a UDF call for a `black Christmas` where it appealed to township residents to enter a period of mourning for those who had died in protest action and to boycott the purchase of all Christmas fare including alcohol. The call was not widely observed especially as the passivity of the protest did not appeal to militant youth. Fosatu too did not support it and claimed that migrant workers were already returning home with their purchases and it was informed too late to participate in the campaign. In the process migrants came under attack from militant youth attempting to forcibly gain observance of the boycott and thus began a process of migrant alienation from the UDF and township struggles.[159]

In Port Elizabeth Naawu was battling with the peremptory style of community leadership and historical divisions that existed in the area. Past conflicts, both political and otherwise, stemming from the Ford strike in 1979 and other conflicts thereafter, simmered between Naawu, Pebco and

Macwusa. Further conflicts, particularly with Saawu, were deepened when Numarwosa/Naawu made the decision to enter the state bargaining apparatus in 1983 and to register with the Department of Manpower. Saawu viewed Naawu's registration as collusion with the state.[160] The lack of unified politics within the union itself also partly explained its rigid and protectionist politics. Under sustained pressure its leadership clung to what it knew best, bargained unionism, and thus tended to interpret Fosatu's worker based politics more narrowly than Mawu which was ultimately the more political of the two unions. The peculiarities of Eastern Cape politics also weighed on this union trying to find its political direction. A former Naawu member recalls how these tensions surfaced destructively in Fosatu local meetings,

> ...we used to differ in terms of adopting those resolutions on political issues starting from the local. For example, on the support of UDF. Many of us were UDF activists and then we would forget this now is not a rally, a UDF platform, and antagonise people who were really loyal to the trade union movement, and give them names, and label them `workerists` and so on, and immediately not support what they were putting forward. I would label you in order to silence you and make you sit down. So some comrades decided not even to go to meetings because of the tensions between Uitenhage and PE [Port Elizabeth].
>
> The Uitenhage local was seen to be populist and pro UDF or PEBCO. The tensions would arise in our local because there were a lot of actions then supposed to be supported by workers, and it would not come as a point of discussion, it would come as information or instruction. And comrades would start questioning how this call for action came about. Others would justify it, and then the union would call an action and the civic would not support the action. The union had to have a `bosberaad` [meeting/discussion] in the township with civic organisations to discuss these tensions up to midnight close to hitting each other and not resolving tensions.[161]

This political divide spilled over into community and youth organisations thus, for example, the East London Youth Organisation supported Saawu, and the East London Youth Congress aligned itself with Naawu. These divisions rendered the launch of joint political action more complex than in the Transvaal. In 1985 Pebco and Pewo (PE Womens Organisation), both UDF affiliates, called for a Black Weekend consumer boycott from the 16-17 March 1985 and a stayaway on 18 March. The UDF affiliated trade unions supported the action but Naawu refused to mobilise its members to observe the protest.[162] Ironically Pebco raised a number of worker oriented issues including a protest against mass retrenchments and the Amcar-Ford merger which would result in further retrenchments, as well as petrol and paraffin price increases which would effect all in the community.[163] A hesitant Naawu was alienated by the lack of proper consultation on the part of its potential alliance partners chiefly the UDF's Pebco, Macwusa, Saawu and Gwusa. Commented Fosatu's Eastern Cape regional chair Tembinkosi Mkalipi, "Since the November stayaway in the Transvaal there have been suggestions that in PE [Port Elizabeth] we should also have a stayaway. But an official decision was only taken in January and we saw it announced in the press. We had a meeting, Fosatu, Pebco and other UDF affiliates, and we asked why they had now come to the unions when the decision for a stayaway had already been made."[164] Naawu had other objections

too. It was concerned about the scale of retrenchments and believed a stayaway would lead to further dismissals. It also believed the demands were ill-conceived and not attainable and that its coloured membership would not identify with such an action.[165]

Pebco elected a stayaway committee excluding the Fosatu unions. On 18 March most African workers in the area stayed away although most coloured workers did not. The success of mobilising large numbers did not however cement unity. Unlike the Transvaal stayaway, the fact of bringing out workers in large numbers was not viewed as a success in itself. High levels of politicisation already existed in the Eastern Cape amongst African workers. Fosatu's Mkalipi responded thus, "Many workers in small factories were fired, some workers were suspended and many lost wages. We agree in terms of the numbers the stayaway was successful. But petrol is still the same price, bus fares are the same and GST unchanged. Nothing has been effected by the stayaway except workers have suffered."[166]

Hard on the heels of the stayaway, on March 22, followed the Langa massacre where police fired on a peaceful march in the Port Elizabeth township killing 23 people. Union and community activists were shocked but their divisions remained. Naawu and Fosatu passively supported a UDF stayaway but organised a separate action. The IMF donated money through Naawu to the families of the deceased as did workers from Volkswagen, Dorbyl, and Goodyear. A week later Fosatu mobilised 8 000 workers, including thousands of Naawu members to conduct a 15 minute stoppage during work time to protest the killings.[167] A *Fosatu Workers News* article reflected the extent of the hostilities at the time. It accused UDF unions and leadership of opportunistically using the Langa massacre to boost their organisations and of refusing to meet with Fosatu to plan joint action. "Macwusa and Gwusa, Fosatu worker leaders said, were using their positions in the UDF to undermine Fosatu's strong presence in Uitenhage. They have hi-jacked funerals and used them as a platform to attack Fosatu and Naawu leaders as enemies of the people. More recently they have attempted to smear Fosatu by saying that it was responsible for the Langa massacre."[168]

Soon after, in July of the same year, Naawu members took action around imposing the international anti-apartheid sports boycott on South Africa. The action was effective but again it was taken in isolation from local political and community organisations although it spoke on the community's behalf. Volkswagen took the decision to promote the All Blacks Rugby Tour to South Africa through the donation of 12 mini buses to the SA Rugby Board to transport the team around the country. A Naawu official announced, "Having noted the black community's justified opposition to the tour, we call upon the company to withdraw the gesture immediately and apologise to the black community".[169] Naawu's Volkswagen membership actively engaged in opposition to the tour despite its keen interest in rugby. Shopsteward Sam Makhanya condemned the tour as "...insensitive...How can a multi-national like Volkswagen which operates in a riot torn

area like Uitenhage think of a thing like this?... We are not interested in providing transport for the pleasure of the privileged `minority`". [170] Over 3000 members struck which, through the union's international connections, gained international publicity. In New Zealand a court order was obtained forbidding the All Blacks from leaving New Zealand. Workers immediately ceased their action.[171]

In contrast to the tense political contestation unfolding in the Eastern Cape, areas where the UDF was not strong and Fosatu unions predominated, were characterised by unity of action and high levels of union participation in community opposition politics. Mawu's participation in Northern Natal community politics contrasted sharply with its own, and Naawu's, engagement in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape. In Empangeni, the UDF and its affiliates were minuscule. Mintec shopsteward and later Mawu organiser, Mike Mabayakhulu, recalls the UDF's failure to make inroads into the Northern Natal political landscape, "It was very difficult in our region to have proper UDF structures. So the struggles that the UDF waged in other regions, in our region were waged by the union because it was the only organised force. When Archie Gumede, president of the UDF, went to Empangeni in July 1985, he was attacked by Inkatha and his meeting was broken up, and so it was very hard for UDF structures to organise."[172] Mawu's leadership therefore filled the gap. Whilst its regional politics concurred with the national view that the working class was the vanguard of the struggle, it defined the working class, according to Mabayakhulu, "... not just in terms of those actually working but ... you had to organise a range of forces in order to lead them."[173]

The union had first become involved in community politics in 1982 when the local bus company, Ekhwezi, raised fares to levels that community and working commuters could not afford. The Fosatu Northern Natal Region, chaired by Jeffrey Vilane, and dominated by Mawu and TGWU shopstewards, embraced the issue and assisted the community to organise a three day bus boycott. The company retreated and withdrew the increase.[174] Thereafter the union engaged in low levels of community organisation in order to introduce people to the idea of community mobilisation. Bheki Ntuli, an Alusaf shopsteward remembers organiser, Willys Mchunu, as the driving force behind Empangeni community politics,

> Willys was spearheading this scenario in the community. We go to churches and be active in the churches and community. In Esikhaweni we first organised the youth to pick up papers and clean the township, and then to create bridges so it was easy to get from one section of the township to another. So the community saw us active with our youth so they supported us very strongly. We would also organise workshops for the youth on the ANC, and call people from Durban to run workshops.[175]

This low profile style of organisation suited Mchunu who had joined the ANC in Chesterville in his Durban organising days before he came to Northern Natal. He avoided speaking openly about his politics as he understood the consequence of this particularly in Natal and thus union policies

and the nature of union work suited his aims, "There was a clear decision from my unit [ANC cell] that you are doing very effective work as a trade unionist but at the same time participating in other activities ... it served us well to publicly do work as a trade unionist... and the attention of the police would then be on your work and very little did they look at the other side. It proved very correct because when I went to these detentions they really had nothing against me."[176] He believes that Mawu's worker-centred low political profile in the early days was the correct strategy in Natal as it could not have organised in the presence of Inkatha if it had held different policies. Ntuli too describes Mawu's central role in community politics and its cautious approach to building organisation,

> During this time I was serving on the national executive [of Mawu] and in Cosatu local and regional structures. So whatever we did, we did from our official positions. Then a civic organisation was formed and Willys and Mike Mabayakhulu were part of that... Mawu people spearheaded this building of community organisation, and we also created in Mandeni because it was strong in union membership and our aim was to link the two areas.
>
> In our area politics was at a very low level and it was not easy to get people on board. We knew one day people would have to come to terms with ANC, but we called it the Release Mandela Campaign. We couldn't say ANC or SACP, just talk about Mandela and compare him with Buthelezi. Willys used to talk about building our `own Mandela`. Don't only talk about Mandela because you'll be arrested. Build your own `Mandelas`, people who will pick up from where he ended.[177]

In January 1985 the union made a decisive break with this low profile approach to local politics when the community launched a bus boycott against Empangeni Transport in response to a hike in fares between Empangeni and Esikhaweni. The fares on one route increased by 125 per cent. Commuters had experienced increases amounting to over 320 per cent in the previous six years. Mawu played a leading role in organising the boycott. At a mass meetings in Nseleni, Esikhaweni and Ngwelezane townships, workers decided to have `nothing more to do with the company`[178] and to appoint a co-ordinating committee to facilitate the boycott and locate an alternative bus service. Eight out of the ten Bus Boycott Committee members came from Fosatu unions. The majority were Mawu shopstewards, including Alusaf's Jeffrey Vilane. The tightness of organisation during the boycott reflected this union experience. In a strategic move, which reflected Fosatu's approach to Inkatha, the Boycott Committee approached a Mr Chonco, the speaker of the Kwa Zulu Legislative Assembly, to be its chair. The Committee was concerned to neutralise Inkatha opposition and to avoid being viewed as a UDF grouping which would instantly antagonise Inkatha. At the time Inkatha was the dominant political formation in Natal.[179] Fosatu acknowledged an underlying tension with Inkatha based on its opposition to Bantustan policies and Buthelezi's suspicion of the trade unions, and were thus concerned not to allow this to impede organisation in Natal. Buthelezi at this point believed in the possibility of co-opting union formations in the province. Fosatu successfully managed this tension as Daniel Dube recalls,

> When it comes to Natal, there were certain unwritten rules, for instance, you cannot hope

> that your organisation will survive if you openly criticise Chief Buthelezi...
>
> I remember we had to send Chris Dlamini and Alec Erwin in Fosatu to go and meet with Chief Buthelezi. And the idea was to say `Chief Buthelezi, we are not challenging your authority in Natal as Inkatha leader or as the leader of the KwaZulu government. We are here as the labour movement, dealing with issues that even your organisation cannot address...` The idea was to buy a breathing space for our organisation. And I'm sure we would not have survived had we been arrogant in Natal.[180]

The strategy in the Empangeni bus boycott was also successful. Boycott Committee chair, Chonco, agreed to keep Inkatha informed of developments and although Buthelezi did not overtly support the boycott, he made himself available to mediate in the dispute with the company.[181]

The Committee conveyed the communities' grievances to the bus company only to be told, according to Vilane, by the managing directory, a Mr Steenkamp, that, " `You people are like flies around rotten meat. You can chase away the flies, but when you turn your back they all come back again.` What he was meaning is that after a few days the commuters would be tired of the boycott and come back to the buses and pay the fares. This deeply insulted the community and hardened their resolve to continue the boycott."[182] In the event, the boycott was observed by more than 60 000 workers who remained solid for two and half months. A Richards Bay worker commented, "We do not care whether the present transport arrangements are comfortable or not as long as we achieve our objective - a more satisfactory transport service."[183] The Committee's next task was to arrange transport for boycotters some of whom were walking 30 kilometres to work each day. It met with local businessmen many of whom concurred that the transport hike was unreasonable and thus agreed to provide private transport. The management of Mawu-organised Richards Bay Minerals, for example, provided large buses to transport workers.[184] The Committee also persuaded taxi owners to reduce fares often by as much as 30 per cent.[185] In addition, the Boycott Committee negotiated an agreement with the Federated Chamber of Industries (FCI) which stated that no employee could be disciplined or dismissed for lateness at work and that the FCI would send a memo to all its members to this effect. This was testimony to the power that the unions had accrued in the area and such concessions greatly facilitated workers' ability to sustain the boycott.

Thereafter the Committee, FCI chair, Rob Barber, and a representative from Empangeni Transport travelled to Cape Town to meet with George Bartlett, the Minister of Transport. They aimed to persuade Bartlett of the necessity of increasing the state's transport subsidy to Empangeni Transport which claimed that it faced bankruptcy if it did not implement the fare increase.[186] This rare unity between employers and union activists constituted a powerful lobby. A government commission visited the area and met with commuters, businessmen, and the bus company. Over 6 000 boycotters attended the government hearing, which was forced to convene outside to accommodate numbers. Soon after the state, now under sustained pressure from employers to

assist in terminating the boycott, agreed to increase the company's state subsidy. The fare was in consequence reduced. Thereafter the company raised fares in a manageable manner in consultation with the community.[187]

The action had demonstrated an ideal confluence of union strategising and negotiating techniques with a militant and determined stand by the community. This was reminiscent of the way in which it conducted successful strikes and was the kind of alliance with which Mawu and Fosatu felt comfortable. Working class leadership had democratically co-ordinated a successful action.

Mawu, and to a lesser extent Naawu, played a similar spearheading role in relation to community politics in Brits. Again, the UDF had not established a strong presence in the area and in this uncontested terrain Mawu was able to play a creative oppositional role. Workers had developed an incipient political awareness during the 1982 trial of strength B&S strike through their daily discussions. The Fosatu shopstewards council, established in 1983, further raised political consciousness when discussions on community issues such as rent hikes, the lack of representivity of local councillors and, later, the intended removals from Oukasie were held.[188]

Oukasie was a 55 year old township on the outskirts of Brits. For a period of25 years the state had neglected to develop necessary infrastructure or new housing. The township was a riot of poverty consisting of a mass of tin shacks, sand roads, and no electricity, street lighting, drainage or sewerage - bucket toilets were cleared each day. Ten thousand people resided here and many worked in Brits four kilometres away. This neglected township was considered a `black spot` in a `white area` and thus the Nationalists aimed to expunge it. In December 1985 the local council informed residents that they were to be removed to Lethlabile 25 kilometres away to the poverty stricken homeland of Bophuthatswana where the only infrastructure provided would be housing sites, a tap and a toilet. The state rapidly resettled 4 000 people in early 1986 and the remaining 10 000 Oukasie residents were the next target.[189]

Dantjies recalls raising workers' awareness of what this would mean in their lives, "We discussed with workers that once Oukasie is removed you will not be able to come to meetings in the RC [Roman Catholic] Hall, and that they were going to be moved far from the industrial areas, so this would be an additional cost. They could no longer go on their bicycles or walk as a group to work. And those were concrete issues. So it was easy to mobilise around community issues."[190] The day after being informed of the removals in December 1985 the community launched the Brits Action Committee (BAC) which aimed to fight the removals using the slogan `Ga go mo re yang, re dula go na mo`[191] (We are not going anywhere, we are going to stay). It consisted of five union members and three retrenched workers. Its first demand was for Brits industry to support their workers, and oppose government plans. Naawu and Mawu convened a meeting with Seifsa, the

FCI (Federated Chamber of Industries) and other employers to discuss the removals. In turn, FCI arranged a meeting with a government representative and an agreement was reached that no forced removals would occur. Rumours however continued to spread that the removals would take place. The Nationalist government at the time was concerned about the loss of support from white Afrikaner Brits residents who were stridently demanding an end to the black spot on their doorstep. Its prevarication was allowing the white right-wing Herstigte National Party to make significant inroads into its constituency.[192]

The community, led by BAC, launched large scale mobilisation and peaceful protest from January 1986. This resulted in continuous police harassment. BAC office bearers' movements were closely monitored and at times police surrounded Oukasie meeting venues and tear-gassed participants. The emergence of white right wing vigilantes in the area introduced a new and more sinister threat. In May 1986 a bombing campaign of activists' houses began. David Moedimeng, a Mawu organiser, was one target. He returned home at midnight from a Bosch shopstewards report-back meeting. Acutely conscious of four previous petrol bomb attacks on BAC members placed a piece of corrugated iron across his front window. At 2pm on May 2, a silent fist broke the window, removed the minimal protection and tossed a hand grenade through the window. It killed his wife, Joyce, and badly injured Moedimeng.[193] The resilience of these community activists, however, was notable. From his hospital bed Modimoeng declared, "But the struggle continues. Even if I die now, the struggle continues - I'm going to continue struggling."[194] On the night Joyce Moedimeng died, the government declared a national Sate of Emergency and embarked on wide scale detentions. The tension in Oukasie was palpable. At the funeral Bernie Fanaroff informed mourners, "As we stand here now there is a one day stoppage in every Mawu factory in South Africa, to make it very clear to the system, and our allies, that we will not stand for our people being murdered. We will defend ourselves, and we will not stand for force to be used against the workers` democratic movement. Cosatu has said if they use force against us, we will defend ourselves."[195] All Brits factories stopped work for the duration of the funeral and many Mawu factories in other areas also spontaneously stopped work.[196]

Negotiations with the state continued on the removals. In the political events that led up to negotiations in the late 1980s the Brits removals disappeared from the Nationalist's agenda. The BAC aided by the tactical sophistication and negotiating skills of Fosatu unionists had staved off an imminent action from the state's powerful security machinery. Through a series of delaying tactics the community had allowed the crisis to pass until the state's attention was diverted elsewhere. In the wake of their victory they embarked on rebuilding Oukasie and on developing a viable infrastructure. The Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) was launched and over time a number of Naawu, Mawu and Numsa unionists sat on its board. Levy Mamabolo, a shopsteward from Bosch and a community activist[197] was the ODT's chairperson from its inception until his

death in 1997. In 1996 he commented that, “In 1986 we waged a huge struggle against removals. My union skills were very useful in this struggle…We stopped the removal and got involved in development issues in Oukasie. There was no water, sewerage, electricity – now we have all these things.”[198]

The days of political abstention were decisively over in this outlying community. For them the struggle at work and the struggle in the community was seamless. As in Northern Natal, the creation of powerful community organisations was made easier through the collaboration of community and worker organisation. This allowed for unified responses and for the easy management of practicalities which in larger urban centres, where workers resided in a variety of locations, was much more difficult. The absence of political contestation also allowed for undiverted political development to unfold.

Mawu’s community involvement in both Brits and Empangeni exemplified the form of worker-controlled community co-operation with which it aimed to engage. Its politics has often been mistakenly interpreted as an avoidance of any form of extra union politics or community involvement. Godongwana points out however that embedded in Mawu’s approach to political involvement was a flexibility, “The crude position that you cannot mix with others who are not of the same tendency was not common.”[199] Fanaroff too has described how Mawu tended to follow the lead of its members’ organising efforts guided by the slogan `organised workers organise the unorganised`. In areas where worker leadership dominated, union organising initiatives into the community were easily accommodated.

On a national level however Mawu and Naawu were still associated with Fosatu’s tight independent worker-oriented politics. In May 1985 Andries Raditsela, a chemical union organiser and Fosatu’s Transvaal Vice-Chair, was apprehended by the police in the East Rand township of Tsakane whilst talking to a friend. At the police station he was beaten to death. Countrywide, unionists were outraged. In joint discussions Fosatu, GWU, the Commercial Catering & Allied Workers Union (Ccawusa), and the FCWU held a meeting and decided to call for work stoppages of the maximum duration of two hours on the day of the funeral.[200] Shopstewards were alerted and 30 000, mainly workers, attended the largest mass funeral ever held in working hours. Many factories closed on the East Rand when the whole workforce stayed away to attend the funeral. In factories nationally over 100 000 workers conducted stoppages.[201] In most Mawu factories on the East Rand stoppages continued for a few hours, and in some cases for a whole day as at Dorbyl and Siemens in the Transvaal. At Henred Fruehauf in Natal where about 6 000 workers from 25 factories stopped work.[202] The action which was called under great pressure, at short notice, again demonstrated the power of these unions to stage well-observed disciplined action. The Aggett protest in 1982 had engaged about 60 000 workers in a one minute stoppage. In 1985 figures had

doubled and the action was substantially longer. It was again clear however that this was an action limited to workers. Political and community organisations were not invited to participate and the nature of the work based action in the main precluded their spontaneous involvement.

This independent, parallel political engagement leads Ruiters, I believe, correctly to view the period after the 1984 stayaway up to the first year of Cosatu's existence in 1986, as one in which organised workers became virtual `spectators` to large urban township struggles, paralysed by the activities of an insurrectionary youth which did not situate industrial workers at the centre of its struggle. As has been outlined, this was in part due to Fosatu's reluctance to engage in populist struggles but Ruiters also points to the ANC and UDF's lack of clarity around the `insurrection` and their lack of preparedness for its scale and ferocity. The concept of ungovernability and people's power did not progress beyond the townships to threaten the ruling class in the white areas and industrial centres. The ANC's lack of class-based analysis meant that opportunities for welding a powerful class-based unity, which would have established the leadership of the working class and create a powerful opposition force in the period, was not on the agenda. The 1984 stayaway had provided a window of possibility which the ANC was not willing, or not able, to grasp.[203] This of course ultimately reflected the ANC and UDF's broad based popular politics which obviated a rigorous class based approach. It was left to Cosatu, whose membership directly threatened the economic base of the ruling class, to take up such a struggle in a meaningful way.

Ruiters, assessing East Rand politics between 1984-1986 views the lack of co-ordination between Fosatu, and Mawu in particular as its largest and strongest affiliate, and the townships, as `a cardinal weakness` in the Federation's political strategy. He sees Fosatu's abstentionism as instituting "a legacy of mistrust which contributed to tensions between townships and industrially based organisations; these tensions unfolded tragically in the 1984-1986 period."[204] He cogently argues that Fosatu missed a political opportunity in the face of an ANC which was calling for ungovernability and revolutionary violence `but was in no position to organise such violence; nor did it have the political will and clarity of perspective to do so`;[205] and a weak UDF leadership which was unable to adequately guide its militant township followers, in particular the youth. It is not clear nevertheless precisely what alternative Ruiters is envisaging. Is he thinking in terms of the possibility of a `genuine insurrection`? Is he implying that with Fosatu's intervention a socialist revolution might have resulted, or some other form of political resolution such as a negotiated settlement? If this is what he is suggesting it is an idealised picture of the possibilities of the period. It is unlikely that a successful socialist revolution could have eventuated at this point even if Fosatu had fully engaged with community politics. Firstly, as Ruiters concedes, Mawu was under enormous pressure. In fact the union was at breaking point as it struggled to manage the rash of strikes that swept across the East Rand between 1981- 1982 and to service and educate the numerous new factories coming into the union. It was experiencing an organisational and capacity

crisis as the union grew beyond expectations. Some excellent leadership had of course emerged which was willing to engage in township politics. But experienced organisers and shopstewards were too scarce on the ground for the union to give meaningful guidance on any scale. Secondly Fosatu leadership was ill-prepared, for the implementation of any socialist project and an element of posturing in some of its hardline positions was in evidence. There was no evidence of any serious attempt to produce a programme to guide it in the accession of a socialist state and indeed, the question needs to be asked, as to how seriously it took such a possibility. The dominant mode of operation in the union, anyway, was a gradualist approach to accessing power rather than that of a sharp, revolutionary rupture. Even its more overtly political leadership (such as those who broke away from the union) had not seriously examined what it meant to take power. Most glaringly workers were not armed. The relative power of labour versus the state at this point was radically skewed in the state's favour. The armed forces in President PW Botha's government were extremely powerful and Botha was close to the military establishment.[206] A negotiated political alternative, even if in secret, was not yet being explored.[207] Workers were in no position to engage the military. Even if they had been, Fosatu and Mawu's reach was not sufficient to ensure a national uprising. They were strong in specific industrial areas but were certain to face defeat in a similar manner to the Turin worker revolts in 1919, that Gramsci recorded, where Turin workers were not supported by workers or the peasantry in other parts of the country and soon faced defeat.[208] It was only in Numsa that the union was able to attain the scale and extent of organisation that would make anything like this look feasible. It is possible of course that Fosatu could have participated on single- issue political fronts which directly affected its membership such as the Katlehong demolitions, which as Ruiters argues, was the very least it should have done to protect its membership, but this hardly warrants the description of tensions unfolding `tragically in the 1984 -1986 period`.

It may be however that Ruiters is referring to Fosatu's missed opportunity to influence and guide `immediatist` youth. There is no doubt that in its politics of deferral Fosatu did indeed miss the opportunity to further its socialist beliefs by actively engaging the youth and community members in discussion in order to create a more solid socialist foundation to influence future negotiations or interactions with the liberation movement. It missed the opportunity to increase its influence in the ideological terrain, in the creation of a counter-hegemony, in the manner that Gramsci had viewed so important. Gramsci posits the creation of a new `integrated culture` which would not emerge as a full-blown ideological vacuum but which would develop in stages "initially taking the form of scepticism, doubting, and cynicism about prevailing ideas, theories and values, as well as sporadic manifestations of primitive revolt."[209] According to him, in this transitional period, the ruling class loses its consensus `exercising coercive force alone...the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they previously believed... the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms

appears."[210] What matters to Gramsci in the `interregnum` is the capacity of the left to step into this ideological vacuum and take advantage of the space, `which in turn depends on intellectual-cultural preparation, level of organisation, and unity (`homogeneity`) of the revolutionary movement.`[211] Fosatu missed an opportunity but it should be noted that at this point Mawu and Fosatu had not undergone the preparation, or attained the level of national organisation and unity to influence the outcome of a `genuine insurrection` decisively. As will be explored below, it was evident in Cosatu's first year of existence, that Mawu's socialist project was not embraced by all unions in the country or in the federation and unity of political objectives was not assured. For Fosatu such a project demanded time, manpower and patience and patience was precisely what this immediatist youth did not possess and was not interested in developing. It is doubtful that Fosatu shopstewards would have been able to contain the sheer force and numbers of youth enthusiastic for action in the face of the ANC's call for `ungovernibility` which, it is true existed in a contested ideological terrain within the ANC, but where no such contestation was occurring within the UDF. Ironically it was only when activist youth had been contained by the declaration of the State of Emergency that unions were able to lead and harness their energies. The irony, too, in Ruiters argument is that had Fosatu leadership been widely persecuted in this period, as happened to the UDF leadership, it would not have been able to assume a central position in the power struggle that would unfold from 1986 onwards. Cosatu was better placed to take on political struggle in the late eighties because of a huge increase in union numbers and influence.

Transitional politics

The year 1986 marked a shift in the country's politics which was heralded by the declaration of a national State of Emergency in June and by the formation of Cosatu in December 1985.

Detentions on a massive scale, and the presence of the army and night curfews in townships deprived UDF organisations of their leadership and made any form of regrouping almost impossible. Godongwana remembers, "The State of Emergency [here Godongwana is referring to the partial State of Emergency that was declared in selected areas in 1985 and which included the East Rand townships] crushed community organisation, and street committees and killed Erapo. Most of the exec were picked up, people went into hiding, most leadership in street committees were also detained... Then all of us had to be inactive for quite a long time. When we were released from detention we tried to rebuild but the second Emergency came in 1986 and these efforts were smashed."[212] Whilst police harassment had always been a factor in union organisation, the scale of repression in 1986 was unprecedented and union activists too were targeted in large numbers. Many Mawu and Naawu organisers were forced to go into hiding, and union offices were frequently raided. By July, 2000 people had been detained, 900 of these were trade union members of which 23 percent were Mawu activists and a number were important leadership figures.[213] Detentions without trial under the Internal Security Act, included, for example, those of Naawu Ford Motor shopstewards Patrick

Williams and Wilson Jonas, General Motors shopsteward James Tamboer, four Volkswagen shopstewards including Mbuyi Ngwenda and John Gomomo, Naawu organiser Makhaya Sam, Mawu Transvaal Branch Secretary Peter Dantjies, and Natal Branch Secretary Willys Mchunu. Tamboer was detained from his home at 3.30 in the morning. He was later interrogated by two policeman who forced him to sit on the floor, "The white policeman held my hands behind my back while the other walked on my ankles. It was very painful... He then put his hand against my forehead and banged the back of my head hard against the wall twice. He said: `Sit daar jou striker`. I still have headaches from these blows.[214] Ngwenda was held in detention for three years.[215] Dantjies recalls his experience,

> I was arrested several times. But the worst was the detention immediately after the funeral of Dave's wife, Joyce. We came from the funeral in the first State of Emergency. We got the message that they were surrounding the whole of Oukasie, and were coming inside, and I decided to run away and we knew there was a list of us they wanted.
>
> On my way out there was a roadblock. As I was driving I heard them screaming: `There is Peter Dantjies!` So I started to drive away and speed up but they closed the road with guns and arrested me. I just saw hundreds and hundreds of police closing the road. That was my first arrest, there was no knowing what was going to happen in prison. I just couldn't see myself in their hands. They took me to Thabazimbi to prison there somewhere. They took me from 1 to 6 am to the bush to interrogate me. They were enjoying drinking beer there listening to music, whilst interrogating me naked in winter, and hitting me and that smell of the meat after three months of imprisonment without eating a piece of meat. I was detained for four months. They were trying to force me to say what they wanted to hear. One time I lost consciousness for a couple of hours from them kicking me.[216]

At times worker leaders were released from prison and immediately restricted to specified areas which severely curtailed their ability to operate as unionists.[217] They were also not permitted to speak to journalists or to attend political meetings where the government might be criticised![218] Often unionists were detained for their leadership role in community activities or because they were suspected of being underground ANC members. At times however they were detained for simply being trade unionists particularly in homelands, or were just lumped together with all known activists in an area. The homelands did not fall under the `South African` State of Emergency but the police in these areas behaved equally, and at times, more brutally than police elsewhere in South Africa. Andrew Molopyane, a Mawu Siemens shopsteward, for example, was cycling home from work when two Ga-Rankuwa policeman attacked and threw him to the ground. They demanded to know why he was wearing a Mawu `All level bargaining` T-shirt, and told him the union was the cause of all the troubles in the schools in Ga-Rankuwa. They took him to the police station where he was beaten unconscious, aroused with a bucket of water, and again beaten around the head. He was then repeatedly forced to mount his bicycle, goaded by blows to ride round the compound, and thrashed and kicked until he fell to the ground. He was detained for 24 hours and released without charge. He was later admitted to hospital for three weeks with kidney failure.[219]

The unions suffered other forms of intimidation as well. Copies of Mawu's *The South African*

Metal Worker were banned, as was *Cosatu News*. Under emergency regulations certain content areas were placed out of bounds for the media. At one stage *The South African Metal Worker* blacked out paragraphs to indicate to readers that it was obliged to engage in self-censorship.[220] Arsonists ignited a fire in Naawu's East London offices. Documents from filing cabinets, desk drawers, chairs, and a photocopier were piled in the centre of the office before the arsonists fled. Membership records, cheque payments, and benefit fund records were destroyed.[221]

Initially fear gripped shopstewards and attendance at shopstewards councils fell dramatically. Godongwana recalls, "Most of them panicked. They were afraid to attend their locals. Only a few attended because there were always hippos standing nearby... After a few months attendance at locals improved after we visited all the factories and told shopstewards we've got to continue."[222] Thus the fear response was temporary. Ngwenda believed that ultimately "the repression mobilised and conscientised people"[223] and Erwin remarked on how every organised metal factory became a bastion of opposition which was beyond the reach of the state, "At this stage there was a very real prospect of a general insurrection. The state had to crush that, and that's what they did. The effect on unions was very interesting. It made it very difficult, but it reinforced that our ability to survive was our strength in the factory, that we could keep alive."[224] The Fosatu style of organisation was vindicated. A steely determination not to be destroyed also came to the fore. Fanaroff interviewed immediately after the Emergency was declared, stated, "We believe organisation will continue, despite detentions of leadership. We believe the South African state is panicking, economy is in crisis, the rand is falling to pieces. We believe they're desperate, but it won't kill the trade unions. The trade unions are too firmly based in the factories, the structures are too strong, and they don't depend on leadership any more."[225] In fact what the unions had facilitated was the creation of secondary layers of leadership. Mayekiso commented,

> Even though it was difficult for leadership to get to the factories we found that the shopstewards committee inside the factories, and the shopstewards councils outside the factories, were operating and effective and it was difficult for the state to wipe out that second and third layer of leadership of the trade union movement. Workers were still able to strike and disrupt production. We have to commend Fosatu structures and the way Fosatu concentrated on building factory strength which kept organisation going during the Emergency.[226]

The second level of leadership started to organise around detentions. They demanded that detainees' jobs be preserved and that they be fully remunerated. Naawu shopstewards at General Motors, for example, demanded that the company maintain detained workers` jobs and continue to pay wages. The company maintained jobs but refused to pay their wages prompting Kettledas to complain, "How can GM publicly and legally support employees charged for using so-called white beaches, while rejecting support for workers detained without having contravened any law? This attitude by an American company is surprising considering that even some local companies have agreed to pay the wages of employees in detention."[227] After months of negotiations, supported by the United Auto

Workers of America, GM finally agreed to pay full wages to detained employees. Soon after Volkswagen also agreed to pay 15 detainees their wages and keep jobs open. At times workers took more direct action. When Volkswagen workers heard about the detention of four shopstewards, including Naawu Vice-President John Gomomo, and Naawu President Jurie Harris, they downed tools, gathered on the company's lawns and refused to return until their release was secured. They were released four hours later.[228] At Renault in Johannesburg, shopstewards launched a campaign to secure the release of Jerry Kau, an executive member of Naawu. Fellow workers organised demonstration stoppages and secured the support of the IMF, Amnesty International, and the French trade union confederation in their campaign. Kau was released without charge.[229] Mawu decided to challenge the legality of the State of Emergency through an application to the Natal Supreme Court. It lost but won the right for lawyers to visit six Natal detainees[230] thus setting an important precedent. An anonymous call was made through two different pamphlets that were distributed in the Western Cape for a stayaway on September 11 to protest police action. Naawu prevaricated but realising that accountable alliance politics was not possible under the circumstances, and after consultation with membership, it supported the one day action together with nine other unions.[231] It was becoming clear that the unions would have to carry the mantle of opposition politics in the political vacuum that now existed.

In time Cosatu consciously adopted this mantle. Volkswagen's John Gomomo, later Cosatu's Vice President, recalls, "...there was repression during 1986, and many community leaders were on the run. The trade unions discussed and debated the situation in their structures. They decided to take a leading role in the community, and this was at great cost to the unions, because they had to neglect their union work."[232] He firmly believed however that this was the correct decision, as he told a Volkswagen World Auto Council in 1986, "Workers are central to the struggle for liberation of the South African people. While we are not a political organisation, we have long recognised that industrial issues are political and the struggle for workers rights on the shopfloor cannot be separated from the struggle for the freedom of our people."[233]

Soon shopstewards were actively participating in community struggles all over the country and educating members in civic and organisational matters. Working class politics had decisively made the shift from its location in the workplace into the broader struggle against racial oppression. Ngwenda recalls:

> We used to emphasise that you cannot be `a clock card shopsteward` - after 5 o'clock and you've knocked off then it's the end of the struggle... the struggle is a life long thing and you struggle wherever you are... So over the weekend and after hours we attended community structures.
>
> Our shopstewards used to lead with their skills, knowledge, and the exposure they got from the union and the engagement with management, they brought to community organisations. They would use negotiation skills. A civic would have to take a demand for

> water, and roads to local authorities, and articulate your position, and understand that at some point you must strike a compromise. They would get non-union comrades from the community and talk about negotiation skills, what do we mean by a leader, what are leadership skills, how do you address people, how to run a meeting, and this was a standing programme for a couple of hours every weekend.[234]

Mawu's general secretary Moses Mayekiso soon came to symbolise the broadening of the trade unions' role. Godongwana believes his activities provided an important example to factory leadership who now actively engaged in township politics.[235] Mayeksio initially began to question the union's unbalanced approach to communities and its contribution to the union's lack of success in preventing replacement labour during industrial action. According to him, "We realised that power is not enough because if we have a strike here the people in the community will replace them. We have to link people's living conditions with their wages and then we have total power. It was clear we had to organise communities simultaneously."[236] Mayekiso's shift to an involvement in community politics marked a transition from the politics of ungovernability to those of reconstruction by means of the mobilisation of `people's power`. The 1984 Transvaal stayaway had a profound impact on him as he shifted from his earlier syndicalist politics towards a growing involvement in popular politics. Like Levy Mamobolo in Brits, he came to believe that,

> ...there is no division between work and the community... In 1984 I began to argue in the union for a change in policy to greater worker participation in community issues. This was not a change from my previous position. I had just come to the conclusion that working class leadership had developed to such an extent that workers were able to sufficiently argue their position in the community, and to assert a worker position on issues. I emphasised that one could not separate community issues from factory issues. An issue like higher rents was directly linked to the fact that people were earning low wages. [237]

His growing involvement co-incided with the launch of Cosatu in December 1985. Cosatu's formation marked a dilution in the strong working class politics that had characterised Mawu up to this point. This created a much less restrictive environment for the involvement of former Fosatu activists in alliance and community politics. Mayekiso recalls this transition,

> When we put together all these different strands in Cosatu it made Cosatu magic. It made Cosatu strong. Community organisation and shopfloor organisation and that made Cosatu what it is today. Whereas before, Fosatu was concentrating on shopfloor organising. They argued `organise the shopfloor in order to liberate everybody.` Fosatu wasn't saying don't organise the community. They were saying organise first. You must have a core of the organised, a core of those people that are controlling the economy, the workers. And then organise the masses with the pillar being the organised working class, the factories, and that is how you can bring down the economy, the government, and that's how the revolution will be won. Others were saying `no, that may take long` "[238]

Mayekiso drove the formation of a new organisation in Alexandra a huge township adjacent to the industrial areas of Kew and Wynberg which bordered on Sandton one of Johannesburg's wealthiest suburbs. In similar vein to Oukasie, Alexandra had experienced no infrastructural development since the 1960s. It lacked tarred roads, street lights, sewerage, and suffered from a

massive housing shortage. Thousands of workers lived in hostels, or with their families in single rooms or back yard shacks. Mayekiso had entered community politics prior to the 1986 State of Emergency. The UDF was gravely weakened by the onslaught on community organisations that followed and thus Mayekiso's involvement coincided with the decline of UDF politics. In this context where political competition was reduced as in Brits or Richard's Bay, the union was able to play a highly constructive role. Indeed Ruiters has illustrated that contrary to popular myth the `people's power` phase of the UDF was mainly implemented by non-UDF activists and that the UDF failed to develop clear strategies for civics except in the most superficial form of street cleaning, painting slogans in parks, and renaming streets and zones. He notes in particular Mayekiso as a unionist who outlined a plan for the implementation of people's power in the township of Alexandra including a sophisticated plan for street committees.[239]

In 1980 a Cosas branch had emerged to organise the township youth. Subsequently, in 1983 three community organisations were launched, namely the Alex Civic Association, the Alexandra Youth Congress, and the Alexandra Residents Association. However organisation remained fragmented, undemocratic and often ineffective. Mayekiso's union background and his ideas around community organisation were know to youth activists and thus he was approached to assist in the rebuilding of organisation. Applying his union experience he developed an organisational strategy and became a central figure in the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) launched in February 1986. Here he describes the strategy,

> People were disorganised in Alexandra and they wanted to be united. I mentioned that people from other townships, like Queenstown, had built street committees and that they were working effectively. I spoke about my trade union experience and how union structures could be adapted to community organisation. I emphasised the importance of democracy, accountability of elected leaders, answerability and responsibility.
>
> We held meetings street by street to hear from people how they wanted to organise Alexandra. People decided that they should form yard, block and street committees which would come together under a co-ordinating committee.
>
> We also planned to have unemployed co-operatives in each street, so that everyone who was not working would be doing something for the community. We looked at childcare structures. Transport problems, co-operative buying, and a first aid system...[240]

Obed Bapela a member of the Alexandra Youth Congress recalls Mayekiso's impact on community organisation, "I was very impressed. We had never done this so effectively in Alex before. Now people were discussing everything - how they could change their own lives. It was not long before the youth organisation and Moss were working closely together."[241] The AAC played a crucial unifying role for Alexandra residents in the way that previous organisations had not been able to effect. Its success was noted and Mayekiso's involvement was curtailed in June 1986 when he was detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act on a return trip from Sweden. He was held in solitary confinement until Mawu was informed that he would be charged with

participating `in activities with the aim of overthrowing the authority of the State.` His activities in the AAC emerged as a central component in the state's case.[242]

It was at the height of the 1986 Emergency whilst Mayekiso languished in detention and a political vacuum emerged, that Mawu held its first National Congress in July in Soweto.[243] The concept had been pioneered by the CWIU in 1985 when it brought delegates from factories countrywide to discuss the Sasol worker dismissals following the 1984 stayaway.[244] It was however Mawu who broadened the idea and established it as a regular and critical policy-making forum in the union. The idea was to ensure that greater numbers of workers were involved in policy formulation, and thus to render the union more democratic and directly worker controlled. The Congress also allowed for the building of unity between different regions and factories across the country and to elect national office bearers. It was to meet annually and become the highest decision making body which would guide the NEC in its co-ordinating activities between congresses. Each organised factory would send one shopsteward delegate to Congress and only organised factories could forward resolutions. Resolutions were endorsed if they acquired 75 per cent of delegate support. The 1986 Congress embraced the directly political theme of `Workers organise and lead for a democratic South Africa` and included discussions and resolutions on pass laws, homelands, removals, worker and struggle public holidays, the release of political prisoners, democratic rights and an end to the State of Emergency, the union's determination to continue regardless of repression, unity mergers, and alliances.[245]

Political discussion unfolded in a context where Mawu was conscious of its new responsibilities in the political sphere and in an uncontested terrain it now began seriously to discuss the development of a socialist programme. The Congress was notable for the openess of political debate despite the Emergency which contrasted sharply with the secretive discussions of the 1970s and early 1980s. Prior to the Congress, Mawu had circulated a discussion paper entitled "Trade Unions and Political Direction"[246] which was to guide the formulation of political resolutions at the Congress. In essence the paper spelt out a position that Mawu had consistently advocated. It outlined the lack of government and employer solutions to the country's political and economic crisis. It asserted that as a result negotiations between the government and opposition forces would unfold at some point but that such negotiations would not eventuate in a socialist South Africa. The paper thus argued that it was necessary for the organised working class to partake in the national liberation struggle but that it needed to assert its independence and engage in building socialism. The crucial question was what kind of alliances should the labour movement forge with opposition groupings who were likely to engage in political negotiations with the state. If it was to assert a socialist agenda in these alliances it needed to assist in the building of democratic community organisations that together with democratic unions would be the `vehicles` for the attainment of socialism. Alliances with undemocratic, `top- down` organisations, outside of workers' control should be

avoided. Unity with progressive organisations, on the other hand should be sought, provided the socialist underpinnings of this unity were clearly understood which in essence entailed internal democracy, working-class leadership, mass participation and worker control. Forging an alliance of democratic unions and community organisations was referred to as ` a programme of action`. The paper did however articulate more explicitly than before that a working class programme needed to be rapidly developed. The beginnings of such a programme it asserted, should be expressed through a document drawn up by members which would define what socialism was, and which expressed what the working class was aiming to achieve under socialism. Such a document would not have to compete with the Congress Alliance's Freedom Charter. Finally it contended that a full working class programme would have to develop out of the struggles and experiences of workers themselves and not be imposed from above.[247]

Mawu's Congress resolved in similar vein that the organised working class should lead the liberation struggle with `a clear programme and aims.`[248] It resolved to discuss a political programme at all levels of the union and in Cosatu, and that "organised workers should also consult their allies, especially the organised youth, in order to build a programme which can bring together as many groups in society as possible... to build correct alliances and true socialism and democracy."[249] The union was for the first time publicly asserting a socialist goal.

The concept of socialism held huge resonance for workers in Mawu. Membership rapidly understood the links between capitalism, racism, cheap labour and the entire apartheid system. Mike Mabayakhulu believed that ,

> Many people in this province [Natal] are so poor and so it made sense for workers to embrace the socialist perspective of the union. We were allowing regular debates so you could get a great part of your membership to understand the policies, and to build up leaders, to get skills to critically analyse the union policy as it unfolds, and so feel a real part of this union and make contributions. The socialist perspective allowed us to analyse political events to compare systems of government and debate...
>
> The racism that people suffered, and because the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] participated in the apartheid structures like the homeland government so people knew that Buthelezi was a `puppet` and that was the popular term used at the time. Also with socialist ideology went the idea of Cuba and Russia with workers taking over and running the factories and free education, health etc. This was very appealing to workers to know that whilst we're running the factory we will some day decide how we then carve the cake...[250]

Despite their resonance with workers, Mawu's socialist politics did not enjoy wide support within Cosatu. Indeed Mawu was sharply critical of the Cosatu leadership. In its position paper "Trade Unions and Political Direction" it was openly critical of Cosatu leadership for its lack of democratic practices. It lambasted it for not soliciting mandates on a number of issues including its meeting with the ANC and statements issued thereafter. This it believed had created problems for

members who were not ANC supporters and public attacks on Buthelezi had rendered Natal unionists' position difficult.[251] The launch of Cosatu had vented a new platform on which to stage diverse political debate. In its early days however this debate inhibited its ability to act as it desperately attempted to steer a middle path between the extremes of opinion. It stressed the importance of popular political demands such as majority rule, a democratic state, and an end to racial oppression whilst simultaneously endorsing a working class socialist view. Multiclass alliances were possible, but under working class leadership as this Jay Naidoo, General Secretary of Cosatu, 1986 speech indicated, [252]

> We see it as our duty to make sure that freedom does not merely change the skin colour of our oppressors. We are not fighting for a freedom which sees the bulk of the workers continuing to suffer as they do today. We therefore see it as our duty to promote working-class politics...
>
> Our experience has taught us firstly, to avoid isolating ourselves as workers and defining our friends and allies too narrowly, ie the danger of workerism; and secondly, to avoid subsuming ourselves in incoherent mass mood or desire for an ill-defined freedom ie the danger of populism...[253]

In reality however most Cosatu unions did not adopt this compromise position and political positions varied widely. Differences centred chiefly around the Federation's relationship to the ANC, attitudes towards socialism, and how broad alliances should be. Three main political blocs amongst affiliates existed in these early days of Cosatu. They fell roughly into the 'UDF' bloc which positioned itself behind a national democratic struggle which aimed to end apartheid. It believed that racial oppression was the primary issue and downplayed a class analysis. This grouping was a powerful influence within the federation but was weak on the factory floor. The second, or `centre` bloc, also supported a UDF/ANC position but differed on questions of style of organisation mainly regarding issues of organisational democracy. The third group was the 'independent worker' bloc and included Mawu and Naawu. It stressed democratic accountable structures in like manner to the `centre` bloc, but politically could be hostile to the ANC/UDF tradition, and suspicious of nationalist politics viewing racism and apartheid as a capitalist tool to divide and exploit the working class. This bloc envisaged the possibility of new working class organisation arising from the factories and township communities separately from the SACP/ANC traditions. Alliances with other classes it believed weakened the struggle for socialism. In the position paper just mentioned, Mawu complained about the UDF unions' organisational practices claiming that they tended not to elicit mandates from workers nor to support worker unity especially on such issues as the dissolution of general unions in the interest of establishing one union in each industry. The 'UDF' and 'centre' blocs tended to vote together on political issues whilst on organisational questions, such as union mergers, the 'centre' and 'independent worker' blocs tended to vote as one. The centre bloc was not necessarily antagonistic to a socialist path but was prepared to enter alliances with organisations who did not subscribe to a socialist

programme.[254]

It was this alignment of political positioning against whom Numsa would be pitted in its future battles to put socialism on the agenda. In the union too a complexity of views emerged. Consensus existed that socialism was the goal, but the route was hotly contested. As Mayekiso recalls, "All of them were leaning on Leninist interpretations of socialism, the differences were on how to get there."[255] Thus when debating issues of socialism in Cosatu the union could not be sure of a united front. The complexities of political positioning will be further explored in the following chapter.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the political stances taken by the metal unions in the early eighties and explored some significant political shifts that they underwent towards the mid 1980s. These shifts were to affect Numsa's political policies and manner of participation in the late 1980s.

The early eighties revealed a Naawu and Mawu that for differing reasons stood aloof from popular township community politics in large urban areas. Their common approach assisted in binding them together. Mawu however did not eschew community involvement entirely and its leadership engaged successfully in this arena particularly in smaller semi-rural industrial areas where the terrain was not contested. In these initiatives both Fosatu and Mawu demonstrated a particular sensitivity to the nature of Natal politics and conducted a cautious but inclusive relationship with Inkatha. Both Naawu and Mawu however experienced strong pressure to engage in township politics, at times through internal union contestation as witnessed by the split in Mawu, and this moved them towards a more explicit engagement in political activity whether in alliances or as independent entities engaged at times in parallel activities.

The period from 1984 to 1986 was characterised by an uneven development in both Mawu and Naawu's political positions. Naawu continued to engage in independent political activity and was locked into an uneasy relationship with UDF affiliated organisations in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage. On its part, Mawu broke from its disengaged politics and successfully participated in a jointly called stayaway with UDF affiliate, Cosas. This temporary alliance was predicated on a high degree of worker control of the action and Mawu's political independence was assured in a short-term, limited action. Its hesitancy to engage in further alliance politics, however, lost it the opportunity to influence the style, content and focus of township politics.

In the process of debate and involvement in contested politics these unions shaped and redefined their positions in relation to liberation politics. Union membership developed significant levels of political awareness in this process which ultimately shifted them in the direction of active

engagement through, or outside, of their unions. Where these unions or their members engaged in broader political action the logic and power of their `bottom up` organising experience, was often in evidence.

At this point in the political development of the disparate metal unions, their deferralism militated against their ability to imprint a socialist viewpoint on township struggles. It remains to be seen whether these unions in the stronger and more cohesive Numsa would be able to wield the power to impel political developments on a socialist course. By the mid-eighties the ideological content of the liberation struggle was not yet foreordained and the question of whether Cosatu, and its strongest manufacturing affiliate, would subsume their identities in a populist liberation struggle or would have the power independently to imprint a worker orientated bias into the politics of the latter day liberation struggle, remained to be resolved. The following chapters explore Numsa's entry into this contested terrain, and evaluates its success in injecting a working class orientation into a future democratic dispensation.

ENDNOTES

1. Giddens, A (1993) *Sociology*, Second Edition, fully revised and updated, Cambridge: Polity Press.
2. Examples of attempts at alliance, or alliances forged by organisations with working class membership or socialist aims in South African history include the 1916 independent Socialist League attempting to unite non-racial industrial unions; the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions in 1928 calling for a front of black organisations; the Communist Party calling for radical trade unions and progressive organisations to establish a Black Republic, excluding the ANC, into a front; and in 1955 the formation of the Congress Alliance as a loose popular alliance which, although not formally in the alliance, included the allegiances of the SACP and Sactu.
3. Evans, Gavin (1982:24): "The Leyland Strike" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No2.
4. Lambert, R and Eddie Webster "The Re-emergence of Political Unionism in Contemporary South Africa?" (1986) in Cobbett, W and Cohen, R (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa - Review of African Political Economy*, African World Press, New Jersey.
5. Interview Des East, June 2004.
6. Ibid
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ginsburg, Matthew (1997): *Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour Movement* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
10. Burawoy, Michael (1985): *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* Verso, London.
11. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, October 2003.
12. Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002. Maseremule joined Mawu in 1986 at the Barlow subsidiary Aluminium Extrusion in Boksburg North and rose to become chair of the shopstewards committee. He was retrenched in 1987 when he joined Mawu/Numsa as a local organiser in Kempton Park for two years. He left the union in 1989 and returned as a local organiser in the Germiston area. On the launch of the Wits East Region he became its Regional Secretary. He left the union in 1994 to join the Farmworkers Research Project. At the time of interview he was working in a joint Naledi/FES project.
13. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003. Godongwana was a worker at H

Funkie & Co (later Barlow Engineering) when he joined Mawu in 1982 and became a head shopsteward and shopsteward chair of the Barlow Rand Group. He held the position of Treasurer on the Transvaal Branch Executive and was a Mawu NEC delegate. He was employed by the union as a Springs local organiser in 1983. In 1984 he left Mawu to join Ummawusa and returned to Numsa in 1987 as an organiser. In 1988 he was a national organiser for the engineering sector. In 1990 he became a local organiser in Butterworth, Eastern Cape and was Numsa's Border Regional Secretary from 1990 - 1994. He was Numsa General Secretary from 1994 - 1997 when he left to become the Eastern Cape MEC for Economic Affairs & Finance in 1998. At the time of interview in 2003 he was Eastern Cape MEC responsible for Economic Affairs, Environment & Tourism.

14. Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
15. Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, September 1996.
16. Telephone Interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
17. It was in fact the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) which was formed in 1943 by communists with Trotskyists leanings and it aimed to create Non-European Unity. It condemned all segregated forms of representation. It tried to engage with the ANC but was not successful. (Lewis, G (1987) *Between the Wire and the Wall*, David Philip, South Africa)
18. The Labour Party was formed in 1964 when government first proposed the Coloured Representative Council (CRC) as a successor to shadowy bodies substituting for parliamentary representation lost by coloured voters in 1956. It originally had strong connections with the Unity Movement and the SA Coloured People's Congress and won an outright majority in 1975 on the CRC. It initially rejected the Nationalist Party constitutional proposals but later went into the tricameral parliament. (Lewis, G (1987) *Between the Wire and the Wall*, David Philip, South Africa).
19. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
20. Ibid.
21. Interview Joe Foster, September 2004.
22. The Congress Movement, or Congress Alliance was in essence a short hand for the ANC which in the 1960s had consisted of the ANC, the white Congress of Democrats, the SA Indian Congress, and the Coloured People's Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions.
23. Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
24. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
25. Ginsburg, Matthew (1997): *Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour Movement* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
26. Quoted in "Joe Foster, interview" *Saspu National*, September 1981.
27. Mawu, (undated): *Mawu Our History Our Principles Our Policies* (Mawu), personal copy.
28. For a detailed description of the strike see Gavin Evans `The Leyland Strike' *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No 2 1982.
29. `Support Leyland Workers', Strike Support pamphlet, May 25, 1981 reproduced in "The Leyland Strike" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No 2 1982.
30. Gavin Evans `The Leyland Strike` *South African Labour Bulletin.*
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. *Weekend Argus* 6 June 1981.
34. Quoted in Gavin Evans `The Leyland Strike` *South African Labour Bulletin*.
35. Gavin Evans `The Leyland Strike' *South African Labour Bulletin*.
36. Quoted in Gavin Evans *`The Leyland Strike' South African Labour Bulletin*..
37. Gavin Evans `The Leyland Strike' *South African Labour Bulletin*.
38. Ibid.
39. Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
40. Fantasia, Rick (1988:238) *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press.
41. Allen, V.L. (1985:8) "Dissent in the Appalachian Coalfields" School of Economic Studies, University of Leeds, March 1985.
42. Lane, T & Roberts, K (1971:105) *Strike at Pilkingtons* Fontana, London.
43. Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 -*

1984, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
44. In May 1980 workers at Table Bay Cold Storage and National Meat Supplies conducted a recognition strike. They were fired and most African meat workers in the area, about 800, struck for a day in solidarity and were locked out. The General Workers Union called a Red Meat Boycott which was initially well supported by coloured and African traders. Employers became more determined however to withstand the pressure and the consumer boycott triggered state intervention. An alliance between employers and government resulted in the detention of pivotal union officials, and strikers and traders' association leaders were also arrested. By August the union had to admit defeat. It was a blow for the union and it never recovered in the meat industry. (Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today*).
45. Ibid, p208.
46. Ibid.
47. "Documents: The Workers' Struggle - Where does Fosatu stand? *South African Labour Bulletin* July 1982 Vol 7 No 8.
48. Sauls, J "Class, race and the future of socialism" *New Left Review* No 160, Nov/Dec 1986.
49. Ibid.
50. "Documents: The Workers' Struggle - Where does Fosatu stand? *South African Labour Bulletin* July 1982 Vol 7 No 8.
51. Lambert, R and Eddie Webster (1986) "The Re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa" in Cobbett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa: Review of African Political Economy,* African World Press, New Jersey; Sauls, J "Class, race and the future of socialism" New Left Review No160, Nov/Dec 1986.
52. "Fosatu spells out its political policy" *Fosatu Worker News* Apr 1982, personal collection.
53. Quoted in Marx, A. (1992:197) "Lessons of Struggle" Cape Town, Oxford University Press.
54. Giddens, A (1993:647) *Sociology*, Second Edition, fully revised and updated, Cambridge: Polity Press.
55. Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:215): *Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa*, Skotaville, Johannesburg.
56. "Fosatu decides not to join UDF" *Fosatu Worker News* No 26 Nov/Dec 1983, personal collection; Swilling Mark, (1988) : "The United Democratic Front and township revolt" in Cobett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa* Review of Political Economy/Africa World Press, New Jersey.
57. The position of the unions which declined to affiliate to the UDF was probably given its clearest articulation by GWU's David Lewis in "General Workers Union and the UDF: interview with David Lewis" *Work in Progress* 29 October 1983 and "David Lewis, interview" South African Labour Bulletin No 9 Vol 2 November 1983.
58. "Fosatu decides not to join UDF" *Fosatu Worker News* No 26 Nov/Dec 1983, personal collection; Seekings, J (2000) *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983 – 1991* David Philip Publishers, South Africa.
59. Seekings, J (2000:62) *The UDF*.
60. Ibid, p79.
61. Swilling Mark, (1988:98) : "The United Democratic Front and township revolt" in Cobett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (Review of Political Economy/Africa World Press, New Jersey.
62. Ibid.
63. Njikelana, S (1984): "The unions and the Front: a response to David Lewis" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 9 No 7 June 1984.
64. Khubeka, Sipho (1994): "The struggle to be reborn: 20 years of the labour movement" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 18 No 5 November 1994.
65. "Strive to build a strong working class movement" *Fosatu Worker News* Nov 25 Oct 1983, personal collection.
66. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Taffy Adler collection AH 2065/B10-1-C5..2.2.2.National Automobile & Allied Workers Union.
67. *Fosatu Worker News* "We say NO" No 31 Nov/Dec 1983, personal collection.

68. Ibid.
69. "Comment" *Fosatu Worker News* No 26 Nov/Dec 1983, personal collection.
70. "Elections reviewed" *Fosatu Worker News* No 32 Sept 1984, personal collection.
71. Naawu officials Les Kettledas, Jurie Harris, and Fred Sauls were personally smeared in a series of pamphlets which were left in bundles at bus-stops, and outside factory gates in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage by unknown persons. They alleged that workers' money was being wasted by union officials to finance the `No-Vote` campaign and urged members to resign from Naawu. They also alleged that these officials were the lackeys of `the following white capitalist liberals: Bernie Fanaroff, Taffy Adler, Alex [sic] Erwin and many others. So Fosatu has become the labour wing of the white liberals". The union described this as the work of `reactionary forces`. (University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Fosatu documents AH 1999 C1.13.4)
72. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
73. "Workers Unite - Don't Vote" *Fosatu Worker News* No 29 May 1984, personal collection.
74. Ibid
75. "Elections reviewed" *Fosatu Worker News* No 32 Sept 1984, personal collection.
76. Numsa Eastern Cape Region Focus Group, September 1997.
77. Interview Les Kettledas, Johannesburg, December 1996.
78. "Comment" *Fosatu Worker News* No 26 Nov/Dec 1983, personal collection.
79. Ibid.
80. "Interview: Fosatu and the `New Deal`" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No 1 Sept 1985.
81. Swilling Mark, (1988) : "The United Democratic Front and township revolt" in Cobett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) Popular Struggles in South Africa (Review of Political Economy/Africa World Press, New Jersey).
82. In his 1984 New Year message, ANC President Oliver Tambo declared: "To march forward must mean that we advance against the regime's organs of state-power, creating conditions in which the country becomes increasingly ungovernable." A year later the ANC National Executive Committee called for ungovernability. (Sechaba March 1984, National Executive Committee, "ANC Call to the Nation: The Future is Within our Grasp", (Lusaka April 25, 1985).
83. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 6 May 1985.
84. Bonner, P and Noor Nieftagodien (2001): *Kathorus: A History*, Maskew Miller Longman Pty Ltd Cape Town.
85. Petrus Tom, a Mawu organiser in the Vaal and a Sharpeville resident, relates an incident that took place on 3 September 1984 which illustrates how students took up the struggle to dismantle Black Local Authorities:
...there was the smell of teargas in the township. People were holding wet handkerchiefs, facecloths and towels to their noses... I walked to the main road... we met school children...They passed and went up the street which led to the house of Councillor S.M. Kolisang...After fifteen to twenty minutes we saw smoke coming from Kolisang's house. People came running past us shouting that they had burned the house. The police came in their hippos [armoured vehicles] and those big trucks with wire outside, and with their sneeze machine. They dispersed the crowd with rubber bullets and teargas... After the police had passed, the children came together …There must have been at least 300 children burning the house. After they had burnt out Kolisang's house they went on to councillor Dhlamini's house three streets away. Some people came running and shouting, 'Hey! They've killed councillor Dhlamini. Hau!' You could see smoke coming from his house. It was finished with that man... Dhlamini's corpse was lying outside in the street next to his car which had been overturned. His house was burning, the car was burning, and he was also burning beside his car. Everybody was ululating and shouting, 'Oh, they've made a Kentucky Fried Chicken out of him. (Tom, Petrus (1985:63): *My Life Struggle* Ravan Workers Press Series, Braamfontein, Johannesburg)
86. Swilling Mark, (1988): "The United Democratic Front and township revolt" in Cobett, William and Robin Cohen (eds) Popular Struggles in South Africa (Review of Political Economy/Africa World Press, New Jersey); Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:215): *Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa*, Skotaville, Johannesburg.

87. O'Meara, Dan (1996) *Forty Lost Years* Ravan Press, South Africa; Sparks, A (1995) *Tomorrow is Another Country* William Heinemann, United Kingdom.
88. For example, sixteen men chased Hart Limited shopsteward Kerry Makhoba for two hours across the East Rand, and then abducted him at dead of night. They took him to the local graveyard, then beat him with sjamboks and wire whips until he lost consciousness. Makhoba woke up in Natalspruit Hospital where he spent five days recovering from injuries. A week later the deep criss-crossing wounds on his back had not healed. (*SA Metal Worker* "Mawu shop steward whipped by vigilantes" Vol 2 No 1 Mar/April 1987).
89. Murray, M. (1987) *South Africa: A Time of Agony, Time of Destiny.* London: Verso.
90. "Executive slams union split" *Fosatu Worker News* No 31 Aug 1984; "Former General Secretary went on spending spree with workers' money" *Fosatu Worker News* No 32 Sept 1984.
91. "Mawu and Ummawusa fight for the factories" Ingrid Obery/Mark Swilling, *Work in Progress* 33/1984.
92. Interview David Modimoeng, Pretoria, June 1997.
93. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
94. Von Holdt, K "Trade unions, community organisation and politics: A local case study on the East Rand 1980 - 1986" Honours dissertation, October 1987.
95. Bonner, P and Noor Nieftagodien (2001): *Kathorus: A History,* Maskew Miller Longman Pty Ltd Cape Town.
96. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
97. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
98. Quoted in Swilling, Mark, (1984): "Workers Divided: A Critical Assessment of the Split in Mawu on the East Rand" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 1 Aug/Sept 1984.
99. Ummawusa leadership quoted in *Work in Progress* "Mawu and Ummawsa: Fight for the factories" No 33, 1984.
100. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
101. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
102. Ibid.
103. Buhlungu, Sakhela (2001:185) Democracy and modernisation in the making of the South African trade union movement, PhD University of the Witwatersrand.
104. Ibid.
105. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
106. Buhlungu, Sakhela (2001:184) Democracy and modernisation in the making of the South African trade union movement.
107. Ibid.
108. Peter Dantjies recalls the levels of antagonism, "The NEC was disturbing during the split that ran up to Ummawusa. You wouldn't enjoy an NEC meeting, there were always fights including physical fights. People entering meetings with empty bottles and guns. It was a big forum, a national forum - these groupings were coming together and each group wanted to appear as the honest, and the real group to lead and unite, so there was argument, but also coercing the other group. People weren't sleeping, moving in and out the townships to counter-organise the other group. Moss, Fanaroff, and the branch chair would come to the station in Pretoria, away from the offices, to meet because in the afternoon those others will come in." Interview Peter Dantjies, June 1997.
109. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
110. Ibid. There is confusion in the sequence of events in Godongwana's account as the expulsion happened before the splinter union was established (expulsion June 1984; splinter union established July 1984). Godongwana is probably referring to the reason why Fosatu was unable to invite the `non-corrupt' members (Ntuli and Godongwana) in Ummawusa back into Mawu at the time.
111. "Mawu and Ummawusa fight for the factories" Ingrid Obery/Mark Swilling, *Work in Progress* 33/1984.
112. Discussion Bobbie Mare, Karl Von Holdt, Kally Forrest, Jenny Grice on Collective Bargaining in Numsa, 1996.
113. Interview David Modimoeng, Pretoria, June 1997.
114. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.

115. Ibid.
116. Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
117. Ibid
118. Godongwana returned to Numsa as an organiser on the launch of the union in 1987 into which Ummawusa agreed to merge.
119. See for example Lambert, R and Eddie Webster (1986) "The Re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa" and Friedman, S (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg; Bonner, P and Noor Nieftagodien (2001): *Kathorus: A History*, Maskew Miller Longman Pty Ltd Cape Town.
120. Friedman, S (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg).
121. "Joint ANC-SACP-Cosatu statement" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No 5, August 1986.
122. Johannes, Rantete (1984): *The Third of September* Storyteller Series No 1, Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
123. Tom, Petrus (1985:65): *My Life Struggle*, Ravan Workers Press Series, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
124. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 6 May 1985;.
125. Von Holdt, K "Trade unions, community organisation and politics: A local case study on the East Rand 1980 - 1986" Honours dissertation, October 1987.
126. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
127. Von Holdt, K "Trade unions, community organisation and politics: A local case study on the East Rand 1980 - 1986" Honours dissertation, October 1987.
128. Ibid.
129. Seekings, J (2000) *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983 – 1991* David Philip Publishers, South Africa.
130. Ibid.
131. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 6 May 1985; Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 - 1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
132. "Alusaf shopsteward speaks" Interview with J Baskin in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 8 No2 Nov 1982.
133. Seekings, J (2000) *The UDF*.
134. This appeal from Cosas for workers to observe the stayaway demonstrates how students at the time were linking struggles in the community to workers' issues.

COSAS appeal
Workers, Workers, Build Support for the Students Struggle in the Schools.

For many months 1000's and 1000's of us have struggled in the schools. We students united in massive boycotts to Fight for Our Demands:
* Student Representative Councils (SRCs) in Every School
* An end too all age restrictions
* For the reinstatement of every single expelled student
* For free books and schooling
* For an end to all corporal punishment
* In protest against the new constitution which excludes the majority of people is racist and anti-worker.

- Like you workers: we want democratic committees under our control (SRC's) to fight for our needs.
- Like you workers: we students are prepared to fight all and every dismissal from our schools.
- Like you workers: we defend older students from being thrown out of schools, just like you defend old workers from being thrown out of factories.
- Like you workers: demand free overalls and boots so we students demand free books and schooling.

And students don't pay for books and schools It Is The Workers Who Pay.
- Just as the workers: fight assaults against the workers in the factory so we students fight against the beatings we get at school.

From Cradock to Pietersburg, from Paarl and Capetown to Vereeniging, from Thembisa, Saulsville, Atteridgeville, Alexander, Wattville, Katlehong we have come out in our 1000's in mass boycott action.

Workers, you are fathers and mothers, you are our brothers and sisters. Our struggle in the schools is your struggle in the factories. We fight the same bosses government, we fight the same enemy.

Today the bosses government has closed many of our schools. Our boycott weapon is not strong against our common enemy, the bosses and their government.

Workers, we need your support and strength in the trade unions.

We Students Will Never Win Our Struggle Without the Strength and Support from the Workers Movement.

Prepare for a joint meeting of students and workers to discuss concrete support for the students struggle.
Workers, we students are ready to help your struggle against the bosses in any way we can. But today we need your support.

Issued by COSAS Transvaal Region
Source: ("Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 6 May 1985.)
135. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 6 May 1985.
136. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
137. Fosatu Central Committee meeting, 20-21 October 1994 1984 quoted in Seekings, J (2000:127) *The UDF*
138. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin.*
139. "World Federation condemns `witchhunt`" *Fosatu Worker News* No33/34 Oct/Nov 1984, personal collection.
140. *Fosatu Worker News* "Thousands support stay-away call as anger rises in Transvaal townships" Nos 33/34 Oct/Nov 1984, personal collection.
141." "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin.*
142. Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989): *Comrade Moss* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
143. Quoted in "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin*.
144. "World Federation condemns `witchhunt`" *Fosatu Worker News* No33/34 Oct/Nov 1984, personal collection.
145. Lodge, T & Nasson, B. 1991. *All Here and Now*. Ford Foundation Policy Association.
146. Bonner (P) and Lauren Segal (1998): *Soweto: A History* Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town.
147. "Report: The November Stay-away" Labour Monitoring Group *South African Labour Bulletin.*
148. Quoted in *Insimbi Ayigobi* (video) produced by Afrovision for Numsa Education and Research Department.
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156. Numsa Northern Transvaal Region focus group, September 1997.
157. Ruiters, Greg (1995): *South African Liberation Politics: A Case Study of Collective Action and Leadership in Katorus, 1980-1989* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
158. Ibid.
159. Ibid and Friedman, Steven (1987): *Building Tomorrow Today.*
160. Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
161. Numsa Eastern Cape Region focus group, September 1997.
162. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Naawu publications AH 2065/C10 *Naawu News* "Workers react to stayaway call" Vol 1 No 2 April 1985.
163. "The March Stayaways in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage" Labour Monitoring Group, *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No1 1985.
164. *Fosatu Worker News* "E Cape chairman explains why unions did not back stay-away" May Day Issue No 37 1985, personal collection.
165. Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989): *Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa* Skotaville, Johannesburg.
166. *Fosatu Worker News* "E Cape chairman explains why unions did not back stay-away" May Day Issue No 37 1985, personal collection.
167. *Fosatu Worker News* "Workers donate R 2400 to victims families" May Day Issue No 37 1985; "8000 mourn Langa dead" *Fosatu Worker News* May Day Issue No 37 1985, personal collection.
168. *Fosatu Worker News* "Workers slam E Cape `opportunists'" May Day Issue No 37 1985, personal collection.
169. University of the Witwatersrand Cullen Library Historical Documents Department Taffy Adler Collection AH2065/C9.3 - C12.5 *Naawu News* "3 000 down tools in row over buses for All Blacks" Vol 1 No 4 July 1985.
170. Ibid.
171. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Naawu publications AH 2065/C9.3 - 12.5 *Naawu News* "3000 down tools in row over buses for all Blacks" Vol 1 No 4 July 1985.
172. Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1987.
173. Ibid.
174. Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, November 2003.
175. Interview Bheki Ntuli, Durban, February1997.
176. Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
177. Interview Bheki Ntuli, Durban, February1997.
178. "We will not ride!" *Fosatu Worker News* No 35/36Feb/March 1985, personal collection.
179. Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, November 2003.
180. Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
181. Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, November 2003.
182. Ibid.
183. "We will not ride!" *Fosatu Worker News* No 35/36Feb/March 1985, personal collection.
184. Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, November 2003.
185. "We will not ride!" *Fosatu Worker News* No 35/36Feb/March 1985, personal collection.
186. Jerry Ntombela, the TGWU representative, would have provided necessary information on bus subsidies as his union organised Empangeni Transport which was knowledgeable on the passenger transport subsidy system.
187. Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, November 2003.
188. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.

189. "No to Removals: `Oukasie` workers fight attempt to move them *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 2/3 June 1986, personal copy.
190. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
191. "Report" *Upbeat* No 2 1987.
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193. "Grenade kills Brits unionist's wife" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 4 July 1986, personal copy.
194. "Although apartheid has gone: 10 Years after" Melanie Chait, video production for South African Broadcasting Company (SABC).
195. Ibid.
196. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Naawu publications AH 2065/C10 *Umbiko we Mawu* Vol 3 No 3 May 1985.
197. He was later to become Brits' first black mayor.
198. "Levy Mamobolo The People's Mayor" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 20 No 1 Feb. 1996.
199. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
200. "Andries Raditsela: Monitoring the Protests in Natal" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 8 Aug 1985.
201. The Labour Monitoring Group estimated that 91 000 workers attended the funeral or participated in work stoppages whilst Fosatu put the figure at 130 000 workers.(*Struggle for Workers' Rights: A History of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union*, Chemical Workers Industrial Union, 1994.)
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214. "Detainees Speak Out" *Fosatu Worker News* No 42, Oct 1985.
215. Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
216. Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997.
217. For example, Peter Dantjies, Petrus Tom, Jerry Thibedi, a Siemens shopsteward, and Cosatu Northern Transvaal chair and Mawu Vice President, Jeffrey Vilane, were restricted to specified magisterial districts. Dantjies, for example, could not move beyond the Witwatersrand and Wonderboom districts and thus could not organise in Pretoria North or operate as Transvaal branch secretary. Police checked on him daily. Vilane was restricted to Mtunzini and Lower Umfolosi and had to get police permission to attend union executive meetings. ("Union leaders restricted" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 5 Aug/Sept 1986).
218. "Union leaders restricted" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 5 Aug/Sept 1986, personal collection.
219. *Umbiko we Mawu* "Torture in the Bantustans" Vol 4 No 1 April 1986; *SA Metal Worker* "Workers beaten for wearing union T-shirt" Vol 1 No 1; *Umbiko we Mawu* "Torture in the Bantustans" Vol 4 No 1 April 1986; *SA Metal Worker* "Workers beaten for wearing union T-shirt"

Vol 1 No 1.
220. This tactic was used in for example *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 4 July 1986, personal collection.
221. "Fire!" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 5 Aug/Sept 1986, personal collection. Fortunately Naawu's membership system was centralised in the Port Elizabeth head office.
222. Von Holdt, K "Trade unions, community organisation and politics" Honours dissertation, October 1987.
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224. Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department *(*undated but probably 1993).
225. Ibid.
226. Ibid.
227. "Motor plants agree to pay detainees" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 6 Oct 1986, personal copy.
228. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Naawu publications AH 2065/C10 *Naawu News* Vol 1 No 6 Oct 1985.
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230. These were Vilane, Mchunu, Mabayakhulu, Vincent Mkhonza, Joseph Miya, and Freddie Blackie.
231. "Two-day Cape stayaway" *Fosatu Worker News* No 41 Sept 1985.
232. "Profile: John Gomomo: full-time Numsa shopsteward, Cosatu Vice-President, ANC and SACP leader" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 3 Sept 1990.
233. Ibid; *SA Metal Worker* "Shopfloor struggle cannot be separated from freedom struggle" Vol 1 No 6 Oct 1986, personal collection.
234. Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
235. Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003. Ngwenda also testified to this fact, "Moss is a great leader and the case against him mobilised workers across the country so it was good in terms of building confidence and militance in workers." Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, June 1997.
236. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg , December 1996.
237. Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:95): *Comrade Moss,* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
238. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
239. Ruiters, Greg (1995): "South African Liberation Politics".
240. Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989:107): *Comrade Moss* (Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg)
241. Ibid.
242. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
243. The Congress was held in a tense atmosphere. Police assaulted delegates on their way home, badly injuring 25 delegates, and one member, died from buckshot wounds. The state later banned a copy of *SA Metal Worker* which carried a front page lead on the police brutality. The Directorate of Publications stated that `the article under the heading `Buckshot Death` as well as the photographs are incitement in the present climate and detrimental to good peace and order.` ("Banned: *SA Metal Worker* declared `undesirable`*" SA Metal Worker* Vol 2 Mar/Apr 1987)
244. *Struggle for Workers' Rights: A History of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union,* Chemical Workers Industrial Union, 1994.
245. "Motions for Mawu National Congress 3 -5 July" Metal & Allied Workers Union of South Africa, Johannesburg, personal collection.
246. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Mawu Collection, AH 1077 "Draft 2 - Trade Unions and Political Direction".
247. Ibid.
248. "Motion: Political Programme: Composite" in folder "Mawu: National Congress 3-6 July, 1986, personal collection.
249. Ibid.

250. Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
251. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Mawu Collection, AH 1077 “Draft 2 - Trade Unions and Political Direction”.
252. The common term of address in Cosatu was `comrade` or`com` denoting both an acknowledgement of a socialist agenda but also its heightened political profile. Fosatu had used `brother` (bro) and `sister` (sis) to address fellow unionists although these forms were never as widely used as `comrade` which extended to people involved in popular community politics.
253. University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Mawu papers, AH 1077 “Draft 2 - Trade Unions and Political Direction”; Baskin, Jeremy (1991:95): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Joahnnesburg.
254. Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
255. Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.

Chapter 12

Weakening the Popular Socialist Impulse: The effects of civil conflict

Part 1: Civil War in Natal

1. Introduction

Between the period 1987 -1994 a gradual evolution in Numsa's politics took place of which even worker members themselves were not fully aware. These changes expressed themselves most markedly in the dilution of Numsa's socialist aspirations. The draining of Cosatu's, and especially Numsa's socialist politics, was in part due to the hegemony that the ANC asserted in the political sphere from the mid 1980s onwards. The ANC was a popular democratic movement which did not espouse a socialist ideology, although elements within it did. The following two chapters will explore a range of events, pressures, and political expediencies which were responsible for the subduing of Numsa's socialist agenda. One of the major factors was developments within alliance politics from 1987 onwards. In this process Cosatu, and its affiliate Numsa, drew progressively closer to the ANC and ultimately entered into an alliance with it. The course of this relationship is explored in the following chapter. The other significant factor in the draining of socialist politics was the development of Inkatha-related violence in the late 1980s which is explored below.

Superficially the ideological underpinnings of the opposed forces in the civil conflict that erupted could be characterised as capitalist versus socialist/revolutionary. Here the state and Inkatha would be characterised as the pro-capitalist force and Cosatu and to a lesser extent the UDF and ANC as the socialist and revolutionary forces. This was indeed how much of business characterised these camps prior to the growing contact that it established with the ANC in the late eighties. In reality, the civil war in Natal was to draw Cosatu and the ANC closer but this was not to cement a revolutionary socialist alliance but rather to draw Cosatu, and its most socialist union, Numsa, further from its socialist mission. The Cosatu/Numsa alliance with the ANC centred on a paradox. An alliance was sought by Cosatu with the ANC because of its popular support and historical legitimacy which conferred strength on its worker constituency, including the muscle to pursue a socialist agenda. At the same time it prompted a counter-revolutionary attack which mainly took the form of civil conflict. The attack failed in the overt goal of preventing the ANC alliance from seizing political power but succeeded in a deeper sense since it demobilised most of the organs of popular power, whose vitality was essential to underwriting a socialist project, and

hence precluded a deeper transformation.

2. Uneasy truce: Fosatu and Inkatha

From the mid 1980s onwards Cosatu and the UDF were confronted by growing opposition from Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's[1] Inkatha cultural group. This took the form of oppositional statements on such issues as disinvestment, or on the refusal to support Fosatu and Cosatu the stayaways, or was reflected in the launching of Uwusa as a labour federation in opposition to Cosatu. Behind Inkatha's statements ran a deep opposition to the socialist orientation that Cosatu had embraced. Instead it adopted a firmly pro-capitalist ideology defending such a position with statements from Buthelezi such as, "I know of no other economic system devised by man which can create as many jobs as it [capitalism] can."[2] Such sentiments placed Inkatha firmly in the camp of both the state and capital. These intimations of opposition initially did not constitute an organisational threat, but as Cosatu aligned itself more closely with the UDF and hence the ANC, Inkatha began to perceive itself as an outsider to the main political events which it had less and less power to influence. This experience of marginalisation was to catapault Inkatha into the adoption of violent coercive tactics in order to force its way onto the national political stage. Such violence was initially to rage across Natal and later to move into the hostels on the Witwatersrand where workers became deeply divided. It should be noted however that these working class schisms were not peculiar to the Zulu ethnic group as similar divisions had also manifested themselves in less dramatic ways amongst other non-Zulu migrant and urban workers. This was a painful experience for those committed to the building of working class unity and for those in unions such as Numsa where much progress had been achieved in uniting African ethnic groups, together with Indian and coloured workers on the factory floor. The vicious Inkatha attacks on the UDF and Cosatu members, and the deepening working class divisions, was to cement the relationship between the ANC and Cosatu in the struggle to defend their people against a common enemy. Numsa members would take the brunt of many of these savage attacks and thus it is important to chart the progress of this political contestation and the union's responses to this onslaught on its members.

Fosatu and Cosatu's relationship to Inkatha demonstrated considerable variance and in many ways symbolised their approach to political alliances and workerist politics. Fosatu's approach was governed by two main factors. The one was determined by the considerable influence that Inkatha enjoyed in Natal in the early 1980s. Inkatha yaKwaZulu was formed in 1975 and articulated one of its major goals as preventing the Nationalist government from forcing `independence` on Bantustans. It thus defined itself as a `liberation movement` which aimed to become a nationalist movement representing all oppressed South Africans. At the time, the ANC was weak inside the country and hoped ultimately to forge links with such an initiative. Thus the ANC `Mission in Exile` supported Inkatha's formation. In 1979 however the ANC broke its relationship with Inkatha by which time Inkatha had gained considerable influence in Natal. Buthelezi's response

was to build KwaZulu and Natal into an Inkatha political stronghold.[3] A survey conducted amongst Durban workers in the independent unions in 1976 gives an indication of the support it enjoyed. It recorded that the leader they felt could most improve their situation would be first the ANC's deceased Chief Albert Lithuli, second Inkatha's Chief Buthelezi, and third the ANC's Nelson Mandela. The survey recorded widespread support for Buthelezi especially amongst older workers.[4] The ANC failed to capitalise on Inkatha's power base and ANC president Oliver Tambo later admitted that, "...we failed to mobilise our own people to take on the task of resurrecting Inkatha as the kind of organisation that we wanted...Gatsha Buthelezi...then built Inkatha as a personal power base..."[5] Schreiner recalls how Inkatha's dominance in the province in the early 1980s meant that Natal was a latecomer in terms of the political mobilisation that swept South African townships, "In the early eighties the IFP was still dominant politically and tended to move in the opposite direction from the mass democratic movement elsewhere. So when kids and teachers were out in the streets elsewhere, instructions were given for the opposite to happen so there are no examples of mass worker militancy in Natal in that early eighties period. It was a period in Natal of consolidating an opposition."[6] Secondly Fosatu's worker oriented socialist politics ascribed great importance to the cementing of worker unity and the maintenance of workers' independence from the dictates of political formations. As many of its migrant members were also Inkatha members it thus sought to find a middle way which would enable it to recruit workers without alienating Inkatha whilst simultaneously maintaining an organisational distance.

Buthelezi knew of Fosatu's opposition to the Bantustans. As organiser Dumisane Mbanjwa recalls, "There was disagreement between the Bantustans at that time and the politics of Fosatu, as it was very much against the Bantustans. And it was at the back of Buthelezi's mind that his main opponents were the trade unions because he knew that the unions were not supportive..."[7] At this point however Buthelezi permitted himself to be wooed by Fosatu's arguments, despite suspicions, as he entertained the possibility of bringing the unions into his fold. There were many who were critical of Fosatu and Mawu's judicious approach to Inkatha but Dube believes the union was one of the few organisations that appreciated Natal's unique politics.[8]

In Northern Natal, Buthelezi's political power base, Fosatu was careful to embrace Inkatha in its effort. Former Mawu president Jeffrey Vilane recalls,

> When we launched the region of Fosatu in Northern Natal we invited Buthelezi in Esikhawini Stadium. He was the guest speaker to launch the region. He always said that he wanted workers to join the union so that they were protected in the factory. Strategically we said let's go and get him. I was the liaison between Fosatu and him. I would go and meet him if necessary, and I went and delivered the message and asked him to come down. He came and spoke nicely, he said ... `we can't protect you inside the factory, if you want to be protected inside the factory you must join the union.` After that launch, the workers were flocking in demanding to join...[9]

However, even at this meeting organiser Mike Mabayakhulu recalls certain tensions, " There wasn't any big problem but I remember...Buthelezi turned around to people like Alec [Erwin], who had invited them, and started attacking them saying he would have preferred if the person who was leading the union was his cousin."[10] In Northern Natal Mawu consulted Inkatha on many of its non-union activities to avoid tensions. This was demonstrated for example, by the inclusion of Inkatha's chief whip and speaker of the Kwa Zulu Legislative Assembly in the 1985 Empangeni bus boycott committee.

The launch of Cosatu in December 1985 altered all this. At the launch Cosatu President Elijah Barayi eschewed Fosatu's diplomatic approach and openly attacked Inkatha and all homeland leaders labelling them `puppets` and demanding the release of the people's `real leader`, Nelson Mandela. Again on May Day 1986, addressing 30 000 workers in the packed Orlando Stadium in Soweto, Barayi jokingly referred to Buthelezi as `uMntwana uphind' uphume` which questioned Buthelezi's legitimacy as a chief and labelled him a tribalist whose Inkatha was dividing workers through the launch of Uwusa (United Workers Union of South Africa).[11] Mawu complained to Cosatu that strong personal attacks on Chief Buthelezi had 'created many problems for unionists.'[12] Inkatha was the sole political party in KwaZulu and it believed in the correctness of its liberation strategy and was thus highly sensitive to criticism from other liberation groupings. It did not identify with other homeland parties or leaders and yet the contradiction was that Buthelezi *was* the leader of a homeland and thus, especially younger activists, viewed Inkatha with suspicion or outright rejection. A growing gap emerged between Inkatha's perception of itself in the liberation struggle and how it was viewed by other activists.[13] In retrospect Mabayakhulu views Barayi's declarations more ambivalently believing that a confrontation with Inkatha, and the necessity for the union to deal with the implications of this, was inevitable,

> Then Cosatu president, Barayi, started to speak politics. He said that Cosatu was the beginning of a new thing, that Cosatu was taking a clear political profile with clear leanings towards the UDF and ANC. His speech was not a well-timed intervention. I would not have made his sort of speech. But looking back with hindsight there was something good in what he did by putting clearly what Cosatu's political position was going to be in terms of aligning itself, and from then on we had to deal with the realities of the situation. We had to go out and begin to calm people because we had members of the ANC and Inkatha.
>
> We decided to call general meetings and inform workers that this was first and foremost a labour movement that was concerned with workers' bread and butter issues. But explain also that their problems were not necessarily just shopfloor problems because they had to deal with a government that was denying them certain basic rights. So in a way we got on top of the situation. We could go back and explain clearly to workers. And the fact of the record of delivery by the Cosatu unions was well-known, and we did not lose any members. In fact we gained members in Richards Bay and Isithebe.[14]

The launch of Uwusa was Inkatha's first significant statement indicating its estrangement from the independent unions. Mawu officials in Natal were convinced that Inkatha had government support

in this initiative. Immediately after the Uwusa launch, eight Mawu and one Micwu unionist were detained in Northern Natal under Emergency regulations. Vice-president Jeffrey Vilane, and organisers Willys Mchunu, and Mike Mabayakhulu were detained together with five shopstewards from Alusaf and Richards Bay Minerals. Mchunu believed that the state removed them from active life in order to create organisational space for Uwusa. While they were in detention Uwusa began approaching managements at Mawu factories. The detainees were later released as a result of a localised Mawu campaign after they had spent two months in detention.[15] Mawu officials were correct in their speculations around direct state support. In 1991 the *Weekly Mail* exposed government funding to Uwusa. A number of Inkatha leaders were implicated including Buthelezi, his personal assistant, two KwaZulu cabinet ministers, and Inkatha Institute director Gavin Woods. An October 1989 police memo referred to Uwusa as `a project under the control of the SAP`. It was also revealed in a Natal deputy security police commissioner's report that the security police had donated R100 000 for an Inkatha rally in October 1989 and that Uwusa used some of the money to prevent the MDM from hiring the King's Park Stadium in February 1990 to welcome home ANC leaders from prison.[16] It was the BTR Sarmcol dispute however that was finally to shift Inkatha hostilities towards Cosatu and affiliate Mawu/Numsa into overt violence.

3. BTR Sarmcol: The Trigger

In 1985 BTR Sarmcol (British Tyre and Rubber, SA Rubber Manufacturing Company Ltd[17] fired 969 workers. This initiated the longest running dispute in South African and was to become the trigger for a major conflagration in Natal.[18]

BTR was one of the ten largest multinational companies in Europe, and was renowned for its conservative attitude to trade unions. Mawu started organising the company in 1974. Workers were quick to join and an 11 year battle for recognition followed accompanied by a management refusal to meet with the union except through lawyers and labour consultants. During this period BTR reduced its workforce, without observing retrenchment procedures, from 4 500 workers to 1 300.[19] In 1983 an industrial court settlement obliged BTR to negotiate a recognition agreement. [20] Nevertheless the company stalled for a further two years quibbling over strike and retrenchment clauses in the recognition agreement. In this period workers received a minimum of R336 per month despite the company registering a record profit of R12 million in 1983, and retrenchments and racist abuse continued unabated.[21] Workers staged demonstration strikes, overtime bans, and both mediation, and a conciliation board hearing were embarked upon. Mawu employed a range of tactics to highlight the company's obduracy and at one stage, in 1984, bought 10 Sarmcol shares in order to highlight its grievances and struggles for recognition, which it referred to as `a legend of struggle and bitterness`, at a shareholders meeting.[22] By this time the company and the union were locked in a primal power struggle which assumed a personalised form. BTR Director, John Samson, had developed an intense dislike for organiser Geoff Schreiner fuelled by the prejudice

that as a whiteman Schreiner had identified too closely with a black cause. This offended Samson's deep-seated racism and assumed the proportions of betrayal.[23] Labour lawyers, Andrew Levy & Associates, on whom the company relied heavily, also fuelled the company's union bashing instincts. In the Industrial Court hearing in 1987 the court noted, "It is clear that in advising its client ALA [Andrew Levy and Associates] espoused the cause of BTR very zealously. On the one hand ALA viewed BTR's labour problems with sympathetic understanding. Towards Mawu's trade union aspirations and the strategies employed by it, on the other hand, the attitude of ALA was one of undisguised hostility mingled, on occasion, with disgust."[24] Samson's detailed diary entries which were employed in the conciliation board hearing in March 1985 laid bare their jointly conceived strategy, "Strike two weeks. Would not hire or fire for two weeks. This will erode Schreiner's power base. More acceptable to the UK. A clean surgical issue. Nothing we have done or proposed is unreasonable. If not broken by two weeks we could have a trickle back and lose shopstewards by closing gates. Then perhaps after the warnings, obtain new workforce. Aerial pamphlets."[25]

Following procedures for a legal strike in April 1985, the black workforce downed tools. The legality was irrelevant. BTR responded, as strategised, by firing the 969 strikers and instituting a lockout. At least 800 workers were soon hired as replacement labour.[26] This engendered a deep bitterness. Most strikers had spent their entire working lives at BTR and the mass dismissals left them with the feeling of profound betrayal. Violent clashes ensued and over the next few years a number of scabs were killed while Mawu members were imprisoned on murder charges. Over 13 years of the BTR dispute, 39 people died in violence relating to the dismissals.[27] Dumisane Mbanjwa, a Mawu organiser at the time, reflected that, "It was the beginning of another era where the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party][28] was collaborating with the employer, where they provided scab labour. And it is the only incident that I remember where the scabs were sustained through the support of the employers and a political party."[29] The tension was heightened when in 1987 BTR signed a recognition agreement with the Inkatha-supported Uwusa covering 900 scabs. Once workers were dismissed and locked out Mawu began to lose the game of power. Workers were powerless to disrupt production and high unemployment in adjacent townships rendered them easy to replace. Mawu's overuse of legal and mediation procedures reflected this weakness and their disadvantage was further reinforced by hostile judgements.[30]

It was the expansion of the dispute into adjacent communities in Natal that brought it into an arena of overt political contestation. The BTR plant was located in the town of Howick and about one-third of its black workforce was recruited from the adjacent township of Mpophomeni. The township was impoverished and BTR employees were its prime source of income. Thus the dispute immediately involved the community which was already highly politicised owing to its involvement in a boycott in 1982 of the Impendle Bus Service which had necessitated a 30 km

walk to work to protest a 6c fare increase.[31] At the time of the dismissals Mpophomeni was engaged in a prolonged rent boycott and it immediately embraced the cause of the BTR strikers. Support groups also emerged further afield. The company recruited replacement labour from the townships of Pietermaritzburg. In response the union conducted a door to door campaign in three townships and in Indian residential areas to foster solidarity and prevent scabbing. This resulted in the emergence of support groups in Pietermaritzburg and Durban which assisted in providing strike funds, food parcels, medical assistance and publicity work.[32] The campaign escalated in militancy and pace. In June 1985, for example, sixty strikers attempted to picket BTR's head-office in Johannesburg but were prevented by police. On return to Mpophomeni strikers called a meeting of 2 500 residents in the community hall where a decision was taken further to exert pressure on replacement labour. Police tear-gassed departing crowds and the following evening a crowd attacked a bus and killed two workers, one a scab. Over the weekend homes of scabs were burnt down. Police patrolled the streets, and escorted buses in and out of the township and placed a 21-day ban on meetings. Meanwhile the Mpophomeni community began a boycott of shops in Howick to lever business into persuading BTR to reinstate workers.[33]

Simultaneously the campaign to discourage replacement labour was accelerated and other Mawu companies in Natal began to stage solidarity protests. In August 1985, workers organised a ten bus cavalcade which jammed the main street of Pietermaritzburg whilst workers waved placards, distributed stickers and pamphlets, and chanted anti BTR slogans. The procession moved through township streets educating people on the strike and the importance of not scabbing.[34] In the meantime, the Mpophomeni community began a boycott of shops in Howick to put pressure on BTR to reinstate workers. The Pietermaritzburg shop stewards council planned a one-day stay-away on July 18, 1985 in the hope of persuading local business to put pressure on BTR. It was observed by 92 per cent of the city's black workers. Troop carriers and helicopters monitored townships, whilst crowds of youth battled with the police, and erected barricades in the Pietermaritzburg townships of Edendale and Sobantu. Simultaneously workers in other parts of Natal picketed in solidarity.[35] Unrelenting pressure was sustained as on August 15, 1985 a boycott of shops in Pietermaritzburg's main business area followed. The boycott was well observed as an estimated 70 percent reduction in black trade was recorded [36]. Yet local business in both Howick and Pietermaritzburg refused to intervene on the dismissed's behalf. The Howick Chamber of Commerce remained aloof whilst the Howick Town Clerk insisted that traders were, `innocent bystanders in the whole affair and they could not alter the situation at all`.[37] In Pietermaritzburg employers dropped thousands of pamphlets over local townships announcing, `Boycotts Harm You`. Unconditional reinstatement remained as elusive as ever. Commenting on the union's failure to win the dispute despite substantial resources allocated to it, Schreiner said,

> The feeling was that if we took strike action that we could hold a strike for a substantial period of time because of the nature of Howick and there were only two major townships,

> Mevane and Mpophomeni, and we felt if we could hold those two we could hold the strike together. But what we learnt is that it's not that easy in the context of very high employment and with a company that was really out to break the strike. We didn't succeed in holding either of the townships although we got a lot of support, but a lot of people chose to go and apply for work. We also overestimated the extent we would get support from local business and how much impact that would have on Sarmcol.[38]

In the process of mobilising around the dispute, in Tarrow's phrase, "a cycle of contention" was created which was employed by others in a widening cycles of contention.[39] The mobilisation around BTR permitted a wide range of forces to engage in broadbased protest action. UDF affiliates, black consciousness organisations, and other trade unions, for example, engaged in enforcing the consumer boycott. Thus a unity was forged between Mawu/Numsa and a variety of political formations in Natal. `Cycles of contention` however also allow the opportunity for unassimilable forces to emerge and to make their claims. Thus Inkatha, which was occupied with broadening its influence, refused to support the stayaway or consumer boycott. Initially local Inkatha chiefs supported the strike and permitted strikers to address their communities. In December 1985, Chief Zuma from Impendle, delivered a cow to the strikers as a Christmas gift. Issues of political influence however soon divided people in the area. BTR striker Lawrence Zondi was a relative of the Zondi chief, but a year later he was hounded from his home under threat of death.[40] Buthelezi declared that the strikers had no popular support and that the BTR campaign was a challenge and an insult. The President of Inyanda, the Inkatha-linked Chamber of Commerce, declared, "If Fosatu persists in its boycott call in Natal this will mean that it will openly challenge the Chief Minister's influence. We warned them not to push us into a corner where Inyanda will combine with Inkatha in an open battle to see who is who between Fosatu and KwaZulu leadership.`"[41] In order to reduce tensions Fosatu revoked the boycott after its first month. The newly-forged alliance of political forces in Natal had clearly alarmed Buthelezi on what he considered to be his turf, or his potential area of influence. This concern was aggravated by Inkatha's weakness in the Pietermaritzburg area where Cosatu and the UDF were rapidly gaining influence.[42]

About 19 months after the sackings an event related to the BTR dispute in December 1986 became the symbol of a new era of political contestation in Natal. About 200 Inkatha members bearing flags and banners entered Mpophomeni to hold a meeting in the community hall. At that point of laying claim to the township it had about three members. At 5:30 pm the township lights were extinguished and darkness persisted throughout the night. At one point a group of men, armed with guns and spears, approached a nearby car where two Mawu shopstewards sat with two others. They were dragged into the hall and beaten by heavily armed men, some in KwaZulu police uniform. They were later forced into a vehicle, from which one managed to escape, and the remainder taken 20ks out of Mpophomeni, shot and the car burnt out.[43] Meanwhile armed Inkatha members roamed the darkened streets of the township denouncing Mawu and Cosatu and attacking

known unionists in their homes. One resident was killed, and others were badly injured. The union and the community were deeply shaken. Schreiner remembers murdered BTR shopstewards Simon Ngubane and Phineas Sibiya, who was also chair of the BTR shopstewards committee, thus: "Phineas was the key leader. He was a clerk, and intellectually strong, and administratively better than the production guys and he was a devoted unionists... Simon[44] was a shopsteward, but more a support person. Some people say Simon was a balancing person, the glue, the peacemaker, the person who holds it together but he wasn't as upfront as Phineas. They picked the cream."[45] Their funerals were the site of further battles as police turned away busloads of mourners. The police informed Mpophomeni residents that Inkatha was going to drive UDF/Cosatu out of the township which was designated to be incorporated into KwaZulu in January 1987.[46] The killings foreshadowed a civil war that was to rage across Natal for some years. As Bonin points out Zulu was separated from Zulu on the basis of a deep identity, and hence political, divide. The Sarmcol workers and many from the working class community of Mpophomeni possessed a consciousness which saw itself as Zulu but without the narrow ethnicity of Inkatha. They spoke Zulu, observed Zulu traditions and cultural practices but their Zuluness was a strand in a broader weave of powerful allegiances including Sactu, the ANC and ultimately their experience of their union, Mawu. She argues that the Sarmcol workers through their experience of Mawu, which organised on the basis of accountability, shopsteward democracy, and working class leadership of the struggle, had given workers a clear consciousness of themselves as members of the working class and allowed them to separate class from race. This had also permitted the development of a socialist consciousness. A huge gulf thus separated them from the consciousness of Inkatha members whose identity was wrought through their prime allegiance to the Zulu nation.[47]

The BTR dispute was finally resolved in the courts 13 years after the dismissals after progressing through eight separate legal proceedings.[48] Over these years there were times when strikers expressed great bitterness towards Numsa when support and financial assistance dwindled. As Baba Zondi observed ten years into the strike in 1995 following South Africa's first democratic elections, "The wives and children don't get any advice, they don't get any help, anything to help them work and teach their children, to train, to do something to survive in the future. The union knows these people. The people at the top, we started with them to build the trade union. Jay Naidoo knows this, Alec Erwin knows this, in parliament. We never get any word from them to tell us anything."[49] There were many unionists however who believed Numsa should not squander further resources on the dispute which had consumed more resources than any other in the union. Other strikers paid tribute to this, "... my understanding, the union is us, ... the union did their best to assist us, if you count the years. Thirteen years ... they assist us ... defend us in court to give us sum of money, do you remember when we was having those nine projects?"[50] Another striker argued that the BTR struggle was not just about money, but had been part of a struggle to win worker rights in South Africa.[51] In 1998 the case reached the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein. Judge Pierre Olivier ruled that the dismissals of 969 BTR

workers in 1985 was unfair, and ordered the company to pay compensation. The court concluded that BTR had provoked the strike in order to divest itself of the union. The company had proceeded to enact a carefully planned policy of selective re-employment to expunge union activists. Olivier remarked that he could hardly think of a longer and more frustrating attempt by a union to sign a recognition agreement and that this was the most serious and extreme case that the labour court had ever had to adjudicate. He continued to lambast the company commenting that no responsible employer, knowing the results to a whole community, would dismiss its entire workforce which averaged 25 years of service, within one hour.[52] Each striker received R13 000 in compensation but over the 13 year struggle, 143 had died. As Schreiner bitterly commented, "one of the lessons we learnt was that there are some struggles you simply cannot win."[53] In most companies where Mawu came into dispute an appreciation that a game of power was being played was in evidence and the bottom line for the company was whether the dispute was eroding its profits too substantially. In the case of BTR the company incurred huge losses as Samson admitted. In 1985, for example, when workers staged continuous industrial action the company made a loss of R1 million in a period when BTR anticipated a R1.5 million profit.[54] Yet ultimately the company was more concerned with breaking the power of the union than in its short term profit margins. It viewed Mawu as an interference in its right to govern the company and refused to concede any participation rights to workers. As Abel expressed it, "Even negotiation was an intolerable surrender of control"[55]

The abduction of the Sarmcol shopstewards in 1986 signalled a declaration of war by Inkatha on Cosatu. Inkatha had previously co-operated with the police in Natal to break protest activity such as the school boycotts in KwaMashu near Durban in 1980, and the killing of five students by Inkatha at the University of Zululand who had staged protests to prevent Buthelezi speaking on campus, but the killings of the BTR shopstewards marked a new era of sustained attacks on Cosatu which Inkatha viewed as the ANC in the factories, and on its allies, especially the UDF, which was the ANC outside the factories. Thereafter, throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, Inkatha hit squads instituted a reign of terror against Cosatu, UDF and ANC targets in Natal and a cycle of violence and revenge was born. Little evidence was led in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of sustained collusion between the state, employers and Inkatha but Schreiner believes it was present in the BTR case,

> It was clear that BTR had very close linkages with the security branch and that the security branch had close linkages with the IFP. My sense was that the liaison was significant. There were a number of calls made by prominent IFP people for Mpophomeni strikers to desist from strike action and go back to work and a number of statements about this being an ANC/UDF initiative which it ironically it wasn't. Those three operated in cahoots and fuelled the tensions between IFP and ANC.[56]

It was evident too that the police were directly or indirectly supporting the company and obstructed union organisation wherever it was able. It later emerged that the South African government was secretly training Inkatha units in Caprivi in South West Africa and it was in 1986 that the first units

returned to Natal.[57] The BTR struggle had precipitated the formation of shopsteward locals throughout Natal and it had opened avenues for the union to explore ways of working with the community. Schreiner remembers, "One of the very positive things about the Sarmcol strike was that it did succeed in garnering a union identity and common cause through rallies and collections and days of action in Natal probably for the first time since the 1973 strikes."[58] This fortuitous by-product was however to be seriously undermined by the civil war that erupted in the region.

4. Unionists under attack

The Sarmcol murders began a cycle of uncontrollable violence that spread throughout Natal as Inkatha attempted to consolidate its base in rural areas and to spread its influence into urban enclaves. The dispute had progressed "from a campaign to secure reinstatement of Sarmcol workers" to "a general political tool and spread to cover the whole of Natal."[59] It is important however to locate this conflict in a broader context which rendered the rural homeland susceptible to outbreaks of violence. Bonner and Ndima[60] have commented that from the 1960s onwards migrant life had been assailed on a number of fronts. In the 1960s and 1970s millions of Africans in white designated areas were expelled and `dumped` into overcrowded Bantustans. In KwaZulu alone 2 million people were relocated onto communal land. Government policies relating to the subsequent deficit of land resulted in rural homesteads being separated from grazing land in homelands. A by-product of this policy was escalating stocktheft and communities hired killers to protect their cattle and hunt down thieves. Police were also complicit in stockthefts. Thus even prior to the political conflagration an alliance of rural criminals and police had been forged and violence was beginning to become a feature of rural life. It would thus be reasonable to speculate that it would not take much for police and hired killers, or vigilantes, to refocus their targets onto Cosatu and ANC/UDF activists. The networks had already been created. There is evidence too that stock thieves from KwaZulu played an important role in the 1990s East Rand violence.[61] Stocktheft resulted in widespread dislocation and assisted in destroying the social fabric of rural communities. Thus violence took foothold with relative ease in this destabilised context. Massive retrenchments throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s which had primarily affected semi- and unskilled migrant workers, including thousands from KwaZulu, further eroded these communities. Cosatu's attempts at organising retrenched workers into an unemployed workers union had lacked a committed focus during the 1980s and by 1991 had collapsed.[62] Numsa too had not seriously focussed on the plight of its retrenched members. Thus it is possible to speculate that a measure of resentment towards Cosatu unions for their neglect of former members was present which may have resulted in some unemployed workers turning to Inkatha as their only source of assistance in rural KwaZulu.[63] A poem written in 1995 by the unemployed former Dunlop shopsteward, and imbongi, Alfred Qabula, living in a homeland area, manifests such resentment,

> It has been a long road here
> with me, marking the same rhythm everyday;
> Gentlemen pass me by.

Ladies pass me by.
Each one greets me, ‘eita!’
And adds:
“comrade, I will see you on my return
as you see I am in a hurry
but do not fear, I am with you and
understand your plight.”

“Do not worry
no harm will greet you
as long as I am alive.
We shall make plans with the guys
and we for sure will solve your problems
you trust me don’t you?
I remember how hard you struggled
and your contribution is prized.”

Nothing lasts forever
and our friends now show us their backs
and they avoid eye-contact
pretending they never saw us...

“What is your phone number comrade?
I will call you after I finished with the planning
committee on this or that of the legislature
and then we shall work something out for you, be calm.”
Days have passed, weeks have passed
years have passed
with us waiting like ten virgins in the bible.[64]

In the wake of the BTR campaign Pietermaritzburg and Durban became the focus of intense conflict. In Pietermaritzburg, UDF affiliated civic organisations were harassed and some prominent members had their homes firebombed and family members killed. Inkatha was not however successful in combatting the influence of the UDF and Cosatu in the area and in consequence embarked on a forced recruitment campaign from August to November 1987.[65] In November 1987 Buthelezi spelt out the impossibility of reconciliation, “I am now coming closer to believing that the only reconciliation there will ever be in this country is the reconciliation of the powerful with those who pay homage to the powerful. We are talking about a life and death struggle. We are talking about the final triumph of good over evil.”[66] Inkatha would typically target an area and threaten and intimidate residents into joining Inkatha. If residents did not act on the threats, the entire community or reluctant individuals became the targets of Inkatha terror tactics. These attacks were co-ordinated by Inkatha local leaders or `mtwanas` who were bequeathed tribal power ascribed to representatives of the royal Zulu line. In rural locations where Inkatha was strong these local leaders held considerable ideological legitimacy and believed in their right to rule their designated area in the manner of `warlords`. [67] Thus Zulu was pitted against Zulu. Between September and October 1987, 143 people were killed in the Pietermaritzburg area. As violence spread to the townships surrounding Durban such as Sweetwaters, Mpumalanga, Hammardsdale

and Mpophomeni between 1987 and 1990 about 1 411 people died. In the Natal Midlands known deaths recorded in such townships as Imbali, Edendale, and Ashdown were 413 deaths in 1987, 691 in 1988, 696 in 1989, and in the first seven months of 1990, 620. [68]

It is not within the scope of this thesis to detail the cycle of violence, retribution and intimidation that swept through communities in Natal but in the union arena intimidation progressed through trivial verbal taunts to acts of naked aggression. It included attacks on, and abductions of, Cosatu members, officials, and their families. In Pietermaritzburg, an Inkatha councillor took John Makhathini's (branch secretary Mawu Pietermaritzburg) son at gunpoint, forced him into the boot of car, and questioned him about his father's activities.[69] In Madadeni, Newcastle, and in Empangeni mysterious attacks on Cosatu offices occurred, activists houses were attacked, and death threats from the partisan Kwa Zulu Police (KZP) were common. Northern Natal organiser Willys Mchunu recalls the early days of Inkatha threats in 1985 and 1986 when Inkatha shootings and killings were not common. In this period intimidation and humiliation were its weapons. Thus Mawu shopstewards would be painted white to be identified in a bus queue, or certain individuals would be targeted and sjambokked for organising in a community without Inkatha's permission. The space during the build up to the later terror, Mchunu believes, permitted Mawu and other unionists to engage in extensive discussion on political options available. It strengthened leadership and membership's independence from Inkatha and allowed them to decide where they stood along the political continuum.[70] Morris recalls that Fosatu and Cosatu unions' first task in a new Natal factory was to break the practice of electing an `mtwana` as a worker spokesperson. This custom was replaced by the practice of democratically elected shopstewards and the introduction of participative processes which became deeply entrenched in Mawu factories.[71] Mchunu comments that Mawu, unlike Ppwawu and Fawu factories, had few Inkatha leaders in the union's structures despite intensive efforts by Inkatha to recruit its leadership.[72] This meant that with the escalation of Inkatha's recruitment campaign Mawu/Numsa leadership came under intense pressure. John Makathini, for example, worked ceaselessly to gather evidence for court interdicts against warlords and other killers. Ultimately Inkatha death threats forced him to abandon his house and Lutheran ministry in Sinathini and to flee elsewhere.[73] At different times Bheki Ntuli and Jeffrey Vilane were chairpersons of the Alusaf shopstewards committee, and Cosatu regional chairs. In 1992 Ntuli's house was destroyed and his mother was killed in the violence. Vilane was forced to flee the area after Inkatha vigilantes attempted to kill him hitting him with three bullets. Inkatha attackers twice burnt down his house. On the second occasion he believes Inkatha required his death as he was an obstacle to Uwusa gaining a foothold in the large Northern Natal factory of Alusaf,

> In 1986 my house was completely destroyed, and my car, it was only three months old. I was left with nothing. But the workers managed to assist me buying the clothes for my kids. That was heavy to me. Because the house was insured, the insurance were able to rebuild the house ... . I continued to pay for that car when I didn't have it anymore. But

> worse than that, I rebuilt that house, bought the furniture, and I only stayed in the house three years, 15 March 1990 they came again and destroyed it again completely, everything came to ashes.
>
> Most of the time I was staying with the kids. Every holiday they would visit my mum. The first incident they were with my mum. The second incident, which was worse, they were away. If they were there I wouldn't have coped. The first incident they were only at the back of the house.
>
> The second incident they were making sure that I was going to die. They were at the front and the back, shooting and throwing petrol bombs through all windows. The whole house was on fire within five minutes. When it went on fire, I ran to the kitchen and looked through the window, I saw them waiting for me to come out. They waited until the roof of the house had started falling. I was still inside. Only one thing saved me that day. I didn't panic... I went to the kitchen to the sink. There is a black rubber underneath the sink and I cut that rubber so I opened up the water in the sink and got in under the sink. The water was flowing over my head and that allowed me to breathe. I sat there until I think they told themselves that this man, must be dead. When they walked away I heard people coming in, the neighbours, `Hey Vilane are you still alive, are you still there?` And I said to myself it is no longer them, it is my neighbours, and then I walked out.
>
> That was the worst experience that I had in my life. The worst part was that I couldn't get any assistance. I wrote to Cosatu to Numsa, while I knew in Numsa there were no finances...Cosatu said the same thing... On the previous one I was assisted by ICFTU but the second one they said they were running out of funds. Insurance refused to rebuild the house... Up until today,[1997] the house is still standing, not able to rebuild it again.[74]

Owing to the UDF's weak presence in the area, Natal unionists, especially in Numsa, played a prominent role in organising communities. This inevitably meant that unionists were harassed by the state's security apparatus more than in other areas of the country.[75] Numsa support for members and officials under intense pressure was often inadequate owing to a lack of resources although union solidarity and vigilance was at times critical. Joe Nene , a former shopsteward at Dunlop, Sydney Road in Durban, recounts his experience,

> I was an activist in the township and I used to convene meetings in the area trying to address people, what direction should we take. Because of that I was exposed.
>
> A certain day I was coming from work going to the township. All of a sudden we were surrounded by the police then I was arrested and harassed, until I was unconscious. I thought they were going to kill me. I was in the police truck. They took me around - 6pm until 12 - they were just going all over, assaulting me, sjambokking.
>
> At about 12, I heard a message from the station commander that all the trucks and vans must come to the police station, that there is a person who was arrested and the union people are just asking where is this person. The station commander could not sit in the office because the phone is ringing everywhere, even at home they were ringing him. Phones coming from Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Durban so they must all come back.[76]

As the war progressed and battles raged for dominance in different communities huge geographical dislocation resulted. The conflict forced large numbers of residents to flee their homesteads and to become possessionless refugees. By 1989 approximately 30 000 refugees had fled violence and at least 30 000 homes had been torched.[77] Such battles would result in the dominance of one group or

the other in an area. Organiser Dumisane Mbanjwa recalls, "You would find that there were no-go areas where it would be dangerous for a UDF or a Cosatu person to go past that area. There were IFP and Cosatu controlled areas."[78] In this upheaval Mchunu noted the emergence of opportunistic criminal gangs which presented an additional threat to activists. Peter Andreas in his study of the 1992-95 war in Bosnia comments on the importance of the criminalised dimensions of war not least because of its profound effects on a postwar social order. Criminality and individual predation he believes interacts with large scale conflict situations in complex ways.[79] Organised criminal groups emerged particularly in areas where Inkatha was weak or non-existent. As Mchunu recalls, "New groupings which have no allegiance to Inkatha and which seems to be composed mainly of ex-convicts have arisen. This is the case for the A-team in Chesterville, the AmaSinyora in Kwa-Mashu, Lamontville and Umlazi. In Cleremont there is a grouping called the Ninjas."[80] Frequent reports of muggings, lootings of people's homes and murders began to circulate from such areas.

The year 1990 brought renewed energy to this devastating contestation. It was a year of joy for workers at Mandela's release from prison in February, but it ushered in a period of intense political competition. The ANC deliberately staged Mandela's first homecoming rally in Durban in order to make its presence highly visible in the war torn province. Nearly 200 000 people arrived to hear Mandela speak.[81] Inkatha witnessed the ANC's huge popular support and more intense violence erupted. An even more fierce recruitment drive in the province ensued which involved both the ANC and Inkatha. Numsa's Mchunu commented that, "…in every area where violence has been reported, it has started with forceful recruitment into Inkatha. The recruitment has generated resistance from those who don't want to belong to Inkatha, some don't want to belong to any organisation. The recruiting has been done by certain individuals who later became warlords. They are people who are in control of a group of people who go about assaulting other people. They are well-armed with some kind of political control through being councillors or members of the Kwa-Zulu Parliament."[82] Thousands of armed Inkatha warriors gathered to attack townships in the Pietermaritzburg area in March and April that year. At least 12 000 people, some attacking and some defending, were involved in fighting the `seven day war`. Cosatu worker leaders and organisers were exposed to intense danger. Some factories were forced to shut down, many were hacked to death, hundreds of homes were torched, and 40 000 refugees from townships around Durban, Hammarsdale, and Pietermaritzburg streamed into the city. Numsa's Pietermaritzburg offices became a receiving house for refugees. The South African Police observed the fighting from a distance and did little to intervene.[83] Thus on 9 April 1990 most Natal workers observed Cosatu's stayaway call to protest police inaction. The action did little to change police operations, and the violence continued to spread, including into deep rural areas.[84]

The personal bravery and integrity of Numsa leadership of the time needs to be remarked upon. Few abandoned their members. They continued in their efforts to represent and communicate with

membership realising that the defence of democratic practice was critical as a counterbalance to Inkatha autocratic practices and the growing unaccountability of the youth engaging in violence and acting in the name of the ANC. Mike Mabayakhulu's memories reflect this,

> I had to leave Isithebe to go to Empangeni because I was nearly killed by a mob of Inkatha, and the IPF guys wanted me and threatened to cut off my `things`. We relied heavily on strategy, and this was that we mustn't allow ourselves to be demoralised, and we used the shop steward base which was strong, and well-organised. I was still organising because if I didn't go to the townships I would still go to the factories and hold meetings with shopstewards.[85]

Most senior shopstewards were a target, some were killed. On the hit list were the names of Mabayakhulu, Mchunu, Vilane, and Ntuli. They were forced to flee their homes, live elsewhere, and sacrifice their marriages and home life. Mabayakhulu again, "I had to run away from where I stayed and I had terrible dreams. I used to wake up sweating... I had warned her before our marriage that there would be difficult times... I said to her `If I die, let me die by myself and not take you with me also, I would feel very bad.` It affected many people's lives. Vilane had to go through a divorce, Willys had to stay alone in Esikhawini..."[86] Mchunu at different times had his house and its contents burnt, his car was bombed, and he was shot at both whilst traveling and walking in the street.[87] Often attacks occurred at night. Joe Nene remembers, "Sometimes we couldn't sleep at home. We would sleep outside. We would see them surrounding the house. Other people were used to tell us, `You must move out from the house.` "[88] If the attackers could not find the activist, they harassed the family. Samuel Mthethwa tells this story:

> I was co-chair of the welcoming committee for Madiba's rally... From then it became a problem. People were asking my wife `Is he ANC?` They wanted me and my family to have an IFP card. By 1993 my family were in danger. Many friends came to my family. They said my family was on the death list and they must leave. They were targeting my family because they couldn't get me. By then I wasn't going home. So at the end of 1993 they left and came to Ntuzuma township.[89]

It was not only individual union members who suffered, so did the organisation. Leadership was often in the forefront of organising community self-defence units and thus routine union work was neglected. Union offices became advice bureaus and a conduit to lawyers as members and their families came to seek assistance and to report attacks. Fearful members ceased attending Numsa and Cosatu local meetings, asking, "Do you want me to look like another Vilane?"[90] By 1995, all 20 Cosatu locals in Natal were in a state of `collapse` - not one was meeting regularly.[91] It was testimony to the early 1970s strategy of consolidating the factory floor that the Cosatu unions survived at all. It became difficult to hold shopsteward meetings, which formerly convened until 8pm, as people were anxious to reach home before dark. Shopsteward and general meetings had to be held during lunchtimes or weekends, and sometimes the union successfully negotiated work time off for union meetings. Attendance at such meetings however dropped. Workers complained of staying awake all night to defend their homes from attack, and in consequence they were too

tired, and afraid, to attend union meetings. Vilane recalls how the issues on meeting agendas changed, “There were no longer the same issues, how to strengthen the union and so on. Now we were saying how do we defend ourselves, the incidents, where it occurred, how it happened, and how can we defend and assist the families.”[92] Union discussions on the violence were often tense, as Alusaf shopsteward Bheki Ntuli recounts, “Most of our members just wanted to get fire arms because Inkatha is being supplied. The difficulty as leadership was that people would say, `We know you as Cosatu do not have arms but we have been fighting for the ANC. The ANC is now on board and the ANC is doing nothing` and some people were threatening to join Inkatha... We kept saying we have to talk to the police, but we couldn’t because the police were aligning themselves with the killers...” [93] Securing arms became a desperate concern especially as Inkatha began to employ vigilante groups who roamed the townships at night, despite curfews, attacking ANC and Cosatu targets.

5. Workers and communities divided

It was obviously a fraught situation for Cosatu and ANC supporters but it was perhaps the most difficult for Inkatha members who were also loyal members of a union such as Numsa. As Dunlop shopsteward Samuel Mthethwa told, “I remember Ndebele, an old man with a white beard. `I like to be in the union` he said `but now the time has come, I don’t know what to do. I need to break myself into two pieces. One in the union and one to the IFP. I’ve heard that this union is in Cosatu, it’s in the ANC. I’m IFP, I like to fight when the union is fighting in Dunlop. I also want to be in the IFP.` I could realise he was sincere. It was especially the old guys who were like this.”[94] These divided loyalties resulted in deep divisions between workers. Divisions did not necessarily manifest at work where Inkatha members, despite Numsa’s political affiliations, often remained loyal to the union. According to Vilane Inkatha members recognised that Numsa was the only effective organisation in defending worker rights. It was in the community that these divisions manifested. Vilane recalls acquiring the devastating knowledge that Numsa Inkatha members were killing fellow Cosatu unionists, including Numsa, members.[95]

The war was a master manipulation by the state who employed Inkatha and ANC nationalism to weaken black resistance to the apartheid state and to diminish the growing power of the democratic movement. State propaganda popularised the term `black on black violence` through which it distanced itself from the violence and implied that black `savages` were slugging it out. In a world focussed on the violence that apartheid had engendered it could no longer permit the international media to beam images of white troops openly shooting black resisters. Thus it successfully fanned conflict between different sections of the oppressed in the divide and rule strategy it knew so well. By removing itself from the conflict it came to appear as a neutral broker in a peace-keeping role. It had been directly responsible for training members of the KZP and 200 of its Caprivi trained operatives later joined this police force. Military intelligence also channelled R 7 million through

front organisations to maintain the KZP's secret Mkuze camp for 3 years[96] Bantustans were permitted to acquire their own internal security forces and as Buthelezi failed to distinguish between his Bantustan role as Chief Minister of KwaZulu and his Inkatha presidency, Inkatha was permitted to utilise the KwaZulu Police which linked into the state's national security network.[97] In KwaZulu homeland areas such as Northern Natal's Esikhaweni, the Inkatha sympathetic KZP drove deep divisions between Inkatha and non-Inkatha supporters. The unity forged amongst community members in their struggle against the state during such activities as the Empangeni bus boycotts in the mid eighties was badly impaired. Many viewed the KZP as a bigger problem than the Inkatha warlords. It was bitterly hated and feared, and people went as far as requesting its replacement by the SADF. Geoffrey Vilane commented, "ZP [KwaZulu Police] claimed that Esikhawini was their territory, for SAP to come into Esikhawini they must be called by ZP... ZP were against us, and a lot of damage was done because those perpetrators were working with ZP. ZP did serious damage in our region in such a way that it will take them years to build trust. I don't trust them up to now (1997)."[98] Mchunu too spoke bitterly about the relationship between the KwaZulu Police and Inkatha hit men or vigilante groups, "The vigilantes...see themselves as immune from arrest or prosecution because they are never arrested. In many cases it has been proved that vigilantes have been assisted by policemen. More recently in Ntuzuma, it was found that some of those who were killed while attacking Ntuzuma people were police in civilian clothes. If police and the courts are taking no action against the perpetrators of the violence then violence is bound to escalate."[99]

In 1991, in a new departure in Natal, Inkatha began to focus on the total destabilisation of large Numsa factories. Workers at Alusaf in Richard's Bay were targeted because of Numsa's evident power in the factory. It was the largest of five unions and had recruited 1 960 members out of the total 2 800 workers. A Numsa shopsteward commented that, "Inkatha is jealous saying Alusaf is an ANC factory."[100] Inkatha killed Alusaf workers, not in the factory, but in the townships and by 1992, 46 Numsa members were dead. Gangs of Inkatha supporters waited for workers in the townships, or moved from house to house, demanding to see pay-slips. If pay-slips showed a stop-order deduction for Numsa, workers were beaten or killed. At times buses carrying Alusaf workers were attacked, and workers had to show their payslips. An Alusaf shopsteward complained, "Everyone is forced to go to Inkatha meetings, pay a fee and produce an Inkatha membership card when asked to, or be assaulted."[101]

The union at Alusaf attempted to protect its membership through co-operation agreements with management. Employers however in the region were ambivalent about taking sides in the conflict even if it affected the productivity of their workforce. This was in part due to a racist inability to identify with the suffering of black employees but also demonstrated an ideological identification with Buthelezi and Inkatha's cause. In the early eighties Inkatha launched an initiative known as

the Natal Indaba where it forged an alliance with business and Natal political parties that had entered the tricameral parliament. Through the Indaba it hoped to consolidate its regional power and establish a platform for Inkatha's entry into national politics. The Indaba hoped to establish a regional legislative structure which would be the first step towards federal governance of South Africa.[102] This had great appeal to white business as it posited a non-racial moderate alternative to the more radical ANC/Cosatu alliance and was sympathetic to a capitalist order. Its trade union federation, Uwusa, also held great appeal for business staffed as it was by office bearers consisting primarily of black businessmen and personnel managers. Thus much of business viewed Inkatha and its leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, favourably. The Alusaf shopstewards approached management on the issue of union general meetings because it was becoming progressively more difficult to communicate with members. As Bheki Ntuli explained, "We no longer have general meetings after work. If Alusaf workers arrive home later than others, it is said they have been attending meetings, and they will be attacked."[103] Thus they firstly requested that the company grant workers four hours paid leave per quarter to attend meetings in company time. It refused. Many Alusaf workers were forced from their houses by Inkatha functionaries in Enseleni township but management was deaf to shopstewards requests for help. Instead, when violence spread to Ngwelezane, and Numsa members were unable to come to work, management dismissed them. When violence spread to Esikhawini, workers at the company's Sinqobile hostels asked for a fence and security guards. Again, management rejected the demand. It also refused to convert the workers' changeroom into a temporary shelter for homeless workers. This despite permission given by management for 250 scabs to sleep in the whites-only company changeroom during the August 1992 stayaway.[104] Bheki Ntuli recalls bitterly, "They never did anything for people like Jeffrey Vilane when he had no house. They never provided him with a place to hide. And in 1992 when my house was sabotaged they never provided me with a house. They just said that certain grading levels qualified to live in company houses and I didn't qualify."[105] The company also rejected a proposal to issue a joint statement with Numsa to condemn the violence. The union managed to negotiate for Numsa members to sleep in the company if they finished at 10pm because late buses were stopped and people murdered. Thus the shift operated from 2am -10pm then workers would leave for home in the morning, and return at 12 noon for the next shift. Ntuli simply commented, "It was horrible."[106] When four members were murdered on the bus on their way to Enseleni the union requested that the company persuade Empangeni Transport to post a soldier on each bus. The company's cynical response, according to Ntuli, was, " ... `go and talk to the ANC because ANC and IFP criminals were doing this` and they ended up doing nothing."[107]

Out of fear, about 200 workers resigned from Numsa and joined SA Boilermakers (SABS) to escape danger. The union persuaded the company to employ a code of payment for Numsa members, but SABS allowed the information to escape. Ntuli recalls that, "People would say we'll join twice. On the payslip SABS, and then we'll pay the Numsa money over. That's how

committed people were to Numsa... We used to tell people to resign and say we know you're members and we'll always defend you."[108] Following the 1994 elections, members who joined SABS returned to Numsa. They complained that SABS was unable to deliver, and they preferred Numsa's provident fund to the group pension fund. The pension fund took a year to pay out dependents on a worker's death whilst the provident fund paid immediately and at the time members and dependents were dying so the distinction was significant.[109]

In the history of apartheid there were times where the interests of the Nationalist government and capital diverge. The civil conflict in Natal is not one of these instances. A large amount of overt or tacit co-operation is evidenced in their relationship as the accounts above demonstrate. Both the government and business were concerned to shore up capitalist interests in a future democratic South Africa. If political power was to be acceded, economic power needed to be buttressed. The method chosen was to emasculate organs of civil society in the run up to the 1994 elections in order to dismantle the popular socialist project. In this section it is evident that eviscerating the trade unions was the goal. It was no accident therefore that Cosatu's most powerful, and most socialist inclined, manufacturing union was a prime target and within this it was consistent to target its largest and most influential factories where its most powerful leaders were often located. It was a tactic to which the state would return in the civil conflict in the Transvaal.

6. Union response to violence

Confronted with this onslaught on its members, Numsa and Cosatu considered several options. Initially they focussed on the protection of their members but as the war escalated to the scale of a regional civil war it combined forces with the UDF, and later the ANC to explore strategies to downscale levels of violence.

Its one option was to enter some form of alliance with Inkatha. Buthelezi was willing, and had hoped to bring the unions into his fold. Inkatha's political style however militated against such an alliance. As Morris observed, "...it [Inkatha] displays some of the characteristics of a pre-capitalist ethnic or nationalist movement where decision-making structures are based on ethnically-ascribed power relations... This results in the adoption and spread of practices of personalised power in decision making which spreads far beyond tribal structures into all forms of social and political organisation."[110] This absence of direct democracy in Inkatha's mode of operation rendered it impossible for Cosatu to co-operate with, or conduct joint campaigns with it. Ideological differences too acted against such an alliance as Cosatu espoused a socialist solution whilst Inkatha positioned itself firmly in the capitalist camp. Besides, Buthelezi's initial support of trade union activity in the 1970s, had by 1984 translated into hostility to many of its activities. He had dismissed Inkatha councillor of community affairs, Barney Dladla, who served on theTrade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Committee (Tuacc) and was sympathetic to union activity in 1974. Inkatha

had condemned the 1984 stayaway of Sasol workers where 6 000 workers were dismissed and indeed had condemned most worker-led stayaways. Thereafter, it refused to support dismissed Sarmcol workers and the subsequent consumer boycott, and its union federation, Uwusa, stood accused of strike breaking activity as the NUM strike at Hlobane had demonstrated. Indeed examples of anti-union sentiment in Inkatha were numerous. Taking into account this history, even prior to the eruption of violence, a tactical alliance was impossible.

Another possible strategy was for Cosatu to embark on an underground operation of providing its membership with arms. This was never seriously considered although there were some minor attempts to engage in such activities. Neither Numsa or Cosatu were structured to fight a war as they were non-hierarchical and non-militaristic in nature and were geared towards transparency. They possessed no military command and no ready finance for the purchase of arms. They relied on ANC military structures to smuggle in arms and establish protective units but ordinary community members had no access to such weapons and seldom benefited from the protective force of ANC offensives. In fact, retaliatory measures from ANC units often worsened the violence in an area and thus the military tactic was questionable. It was a war that could not be won when Inkatha appeared to have unlimited access to arms. It had never been either an ANC or Cosatu strategy to engage the might of the militarised apartheid establishment. Cosatu's approach had been one of a peaceful, incremental acquisition of power accompanied by the ideology of passive resistance which involved mass mobilisation targeted at the heart of the economy. Nevertheless the union did advocate a disciplined defence of community people and street defence committees were formed to provide warning and protective systems.[111] Joe Foster recalls that in the late 1980s some of the leadership of Cosatu and Numsa held discussions on the defence of members and officials under direct attack from Inkatha. These meetings included such people as Bernie Fanaroff, Alec Erwin, John Gomomo, Fred Sauls, Joe Foster and Chris Dlamini who were responding to persistent pleas from membership for protection. As one worker expressed it, "`What do you do at midnight when someone stands at your door with a panga? No amount of interdicts and public exposure help you in that situation. It's your skin on the line. You run or you fight."[112] The problem for Cosatu was the raising of sufficient finances to purchase arms. Erwin instructed Foster to investigate raising funds. The request resulted in Sauls and Foster in the late 1980s putting their houses up as collateral in return for a loan of R25 000. The money was handed across `at which point we had nothing further to do with it. At the time the fewer people who knew about such initiatives the better" observed Foster.[113] He also recalls purchasing small arms from a gun shop near the main station in Durban. He acknowledges these were small initiatives given the scale of the conflict but believes, "We did well by arming our members. It made our members feel they could fight back. Such people as Willys Mchunu and Bheki (Ntuli) could at least protect themselves."[114] SAPS and KZP units often accompanied Inkatha contingencies in larger attacks although did not overtly participate in the action. A leading unionist in Numsa, who asked not to be named, recalls that he

was involved in purchasing and supplying members with yachting flares which could be fired directly at opponents instead of firing them into the air, as well as three-cornered nails to scatter on the road in an attempt to damage police vehicle tyres whilst conducting Inkatha to attacks. He also remembers purchasing radios in an attempt to intercept police radios in order to alert communities to an impending action and the route it would follow especially as a pattern of house to house police raids to confiscate arms prior to an attack in an area was observed.[115] This strategy was accompanied by attempts to infiltrate Inkatha meetings in order to gather information on future attacks and on the planners and perpetrators.[116]

Numsa however mainly pursued peaceful means of combating the violence. Its focus was on the pursuit of the legal and peace negotiation routes. Erwin, explained the legal tactic, "Often our activity was to try and expose the state and force it to back off from its activities in concrete terms like court cases to expose their involvement. Everything that came up in the [Magnus]Malan [defence minister in PW Botha's government] trial we had virtually presented all that information to [President] De Klerk and Madiba [Nelson Mandela] in August 1991."[117] At its May 1989 Congress, Numsa passed a resolution which committed the union`s resources to combating the violence and which aimed to build an organised response.[118] From Erwin's comments it is clear that Numsa and Cosatu were successful in their intelligence gathering activities. They worked hard too at locating witnesses who were prepared to testify in order to secure individual prosecutions. Its intelligence work resulted in the courts granting 13 interdicts against officials and members of Inkatha in an attempt to restrain Inkatha warlords from further attacks. In the main these interdicts were ignored. A lack of commitment on the state's part to charging or prosecuting known murderers was apparent and where murder cases succeeded in reaching the courts, prosecutors often found it impossible to penetrate the lies, contradictions, silences, misunderstandings, cover-ups, evasions, and collusions between police and accused. Inkatha accused felt secure in the state's support and often did not concern themselves with covering their contradictions and unconvincing stories. A common tactic in such trials was for the accused to displace culpability onto missing and dead participants in the violence. The state was careful to ensure that crucial Inkatha operatives whose names were notoriously associated with violent activities were not apprehended.[119] Abel has commented on why the law is often ineffective in such conflicts,

> ...the difficulty of establishing a chain of authority between perpetrators and leaders...The problem arises whenever the law seeks to control the behaviour of large organisations, public or private. Most illegal acts are committed by dispensable foot soldiers. Indeed, some Inkatha hit-men were charged, convicted, and sentenced to long terms. An organisation can be changed or destroyed only by attacking its commanders. Yet leaders often evade responsibility for compromising behaviour...[120]

The criminal justice system emerged, in the main, as an impotent weapon in curbing escalating violence. As the killings attained the scale of civil war the possibility of calling individuals to account became more and more remote.

By 1987 Numsa was agitating for peace talks. This was to set Numsa, Cosatu, and ultimately the UDF and the ANC on a prolonged course of attempting to secure peace. Opinions differ on the success of these peace initiatives. An analysis of peace overtures discloses a string of failed attempts, but also a pattern of small incremental gains. It also reveals that Numsa, and Numsa personnel were central to these initiatives. Mabayakhulu believes that although Inkatha was often not sincere in implementing peace initiatives despite participating in the process, Cosatu and the UDF were also at fault because office bearers failed to respond rapidly and to address the Natal conflict with sufficient seriousness,

> ... there were mistakes in the way the IFP was being treated both within the union in that people regarded Buthelezi as not an issue and treated it too simply, and also on a political level in the UDF ... Even when we started handling them in a different context, particularly when we started signing peace agreements with them, even at that stage the UDF was very reluctant. There was this perception that the union movement was unnecessarily accommodating the IFP and Buthelezi...
>
> I think we were able over time to deal with it. From that 'Maritzburg Accord we were able to initiate further processes to deal with the problems in the province as a whole. There was this committee which was eventually joined by the UDF. First two reps each, and finally 10 reps each. This was a Cosatu initiative but without Numsa/Mawu people I don't think this would have seen the light of day mainly because people were treating the IFP as a non-entity that does not exist, and it was a question of time before it perished, and this was a serious mistake. [121]

He commends Alec Erwin as one of the few leadership figures who had the insight into the urgency and specificity of the Natal question. He became an important figure in practically addressing and guiding responses to the civil war. Cosatu was confronted with numerous crises and campaigns over this period and the Natal conflict was particularly prolonged. Cosatu was consequently often distracted from a serious focus on the issue. As the violence initially did not impact on other parts of the country, unionists from elsewhere often did not appreciate the growing terror that their fellow unionists confronted. It was left to Erwin who hailed from the region and who was influential in Cosatu national circles, and other Numsa people, to persuade Cosatu to dedicate resources to the growing problem.

Mbanjwa recalls the failure of early peace initiatives in late 1987, "This ended in some strategies to try and call IFP around the table to discuss the issue of peace... And we tried to make inroads in terms of creating a situation where both organisations could organise without fear. But it did not work because that agenda was the truth."[122] The Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce hosted regional peace talks and a round table agreement to halt the violence was negotiated. The peace faltered under Inkatha accusations that the UDF/Cosatu alliance had rendered Pietermaritzburg a no-go area. In the following three months, over 700 people, mainly UDF activists, were detained in the Pietermaritzburg area and Cosatu were restricted from engaging in politics.[123] In February 1988 the Minister of Law and Order aligned himself with the Inkatha struggle when he announced that, "Radicals, who are trying to destroy South Africa will not be tolerated. We will fight them. We have put our foot in that direction, and we will eventually win in the Pietermaritzburg area."[124] Sensing a weakened opponent Inkatha intensified its activities. It was at this point that Cosatu successfully incorporated the UDF in peace initiatives and a co-ordinated approach under the Joint Working Committee (JWC) was agreed upon. This was a significant moment in cementing the relationship between the UDF and Cosatu members both regionally and at the grassroots level. Mchunu commented that, "It gave us the chance to work with the UDF."[125] In 1989 Numsa employed Mchunu as a Project Officer dedicated to dealing with the violence and it released Alec

Erwin to serve on the JWC. A major focus of the JWC's activities was to assist in the establishment of local peace committees which it succeeded in doing in war torn areas such as Hammarsdale, Ntuzuma, Kwa-Mashu, Umlazi, Chesterville, Lamontville, Camperdown and Wartburg.[126] In certain areas these committees operated with some success after opposing groups signed cease-fire agreements.

In 1989 Cosatu published the "Report on Natal Violence"[127] which detailed how powerful Inkatha warlords commanded armed groups in a forced recruitment campaign. It noted that they operated without fear of the law, and thus a political solution was necessary. It also noted ANC/UDF supporters were becoming increasingly undisciplined and the cycle of killings and revenge was growing. It called for an independent commission of enquiry into police activity. In the 1989 Nicisemi negotiations Numsa raised the Natal violence and demanded that Seifsa pressure President PW Botha to convene such a commission to which it agreed.[128] The result was that the state accused Cosatu of breaking its restriction orders, and Buthelezi demanded that it withdraw the document. Soon after a prominent Natal shopsteward, who assisted in compiling and publicising the report, Jabu Ndlovu and a number of her family members, were murdered in a fire bomb attack on their township house in Imbali.[129]

Early in 1989 the Joint Working Committee convened a peace conference which Buthelezi refused to attend and deputised to second in command, Oscar Dhlomo. A document outlining joint steps to achieve peace was signed. This was the first agreement of its kind and required an ideological shift from Cosatu's membership as the peace programme included high-level meetings with Inkatha. Although the peace document was ultimately endorsed delegates at Cosatu's third July 1989 Congress expressed deep resistance to such meetings. Two months later Inkatha repudiated the peace document, and a spate of killings followed by revenge attacks erupted all over Natal.[130]

In 1990 Cosatu focussed seriously on the issue of Inkatha related violence. This was in part due to further outbreaks of violence in Natal but was also a response to the spread of violence to the Transvaal. Cosatu and the UDF were suddenly confronted with the possibility of a countrywide civil war. Willys Mchunu released a justifiable but provocative statement saying that Cosatu wanted to see De Klerk acting to end `the reign of terror`. It wanted the disbanding of the KwaZulu police, the removal of Buthelezi as Zwa Zulu Minister of Police, and the arrest of KwaZulu warlords.[131] In February 1990 a Joint Regional Congress of 600 Cosatu and UDF delegates was convened in order to develop a programme of action for peace. From this meeting emerged the call for a national stayaway for peace in Natal. On July 2, 1990, three million workers, countrywide, stayed away from work. Inkatha presented the stayaway as an attack on the Zulu people. Buthelezi stated that, "What we are dealing with here is political thuggery by the ANC and Cosatu. I don't think they care how many lives are lost, how many homes are burned to the ground, how many jobs are lost. All they want is to hit out at me personally and get rid of the

Kwa-Zulu Police - political tactics designed to suit their own agenda."[132] The stayaway constituted a part of a national peace campaign but in Natal was observed fitfully depending on the level of threat in the area.[133] In the Transvaal, as we shall later see, the stayaway was a highly ambiguous weapon. The next stage in the Natal peace process was a joint Cosatu/ANC National Consultative Conference on Peace and Reconstruction held in Natal in September 1991 to determine a united response to the Natal civil war. The meeting was chaired by Jeffrey Vilane and the ANC's Diliza Mji. Meetings with Inkatha leadership continued.[134]

These efforts resulted in 1990 in a significant peace initiative in the Northern Natal region. Although the UDF was not strong in this area, Cosatu leadership who identified with UDF and ANC's goals was coming under heavy attack from Inkatha. This had resulted in enormous organisational difficulties where it had become almost impossible to hold meetings outside of the workplace and particular individuals became victims of highly personalised, and dangerous, smear campaigns. Thus Numsa in the region proposed a formal peace process to try and halt the intimidation and to neutralise the growing conflict. This was a significant innovation. Former localised peace processes had attempted to bring the two warring parties together which, although sometimes resulted in a lessening of violence, did not hold anyone accountable for adhering to, or transgressing, the agreement. In the Umfolozi peace process Numsa realised the importance of involving neutral outsiders who nevertheless had an interest in seeing a decline in the violence. The process it believed should result in a formal, signed document. Mchunu played a large part in constructing the Accord and recalls how he and Erwin realised the potential of involving business so that it would be difficult for the IFP to refuse participation. Business was experiencing the impact of the conflict as workers fled the area and absenteeism rose sharply. Thus Cosatu successfully engaged the Richards Bay Chamber of Industry whose chair Rob Barber, an Alusaf director, agreed to facilitate the process. The churches in the area also acted as facilitators and attended negotiations.[135] Bheki Ntuli participated in the negotiations and remembers Numsa's role,

> I participated in the first Peace Accord which covered Mandeni, right down to the Umfolozi River in the Mthubathuba area. That area was heavily engulfed by violence. Then Numsa came up with this proposal to Cosatu, and Cosatu in the region endorsed it. We did that after appealing to our CEC and people like Alec and Bernie, Mayekiso were heavily involved in it, and they were influential, and could convince our CEC that it was necessary.[136]

On September 1, 1990 on the premises of the Methodist Church, the first regional peace agreement, the Lower Umfolozi Regional Peace Accord, was signed between the IFP, ANC, Cosatu, the mayors of three townships around Empangeni, and the security forces. The Accord failed but was to have significant consequences. Agreement to stage a joint ANC/Inkatha meeting where senior leadership would address a mass rally in Empangeni on the Accord was reached. Arrangements were made, and the rally publicised, when the ANC was informed that the Zulu

King, Goodwill Zwelithini, and the IFP would be staging a joint rally at Kings Park in Durban on the same day. “They said we were undermining the king.” recalls Ntuli, “So that was the end of the meeting, and they wanted us to apologise to the Chief [Buthelezi] and to buy a car for the king.”[137] Local Inkatha chiefs also complained that they had not been properly consulted on the Accord. Two weeks after its launch Inkatha attacks recommenced. Inkatha signatories also refused to attend meetings to monitor the progress of the agreement. Although the initiative failed it was to form the foundation of a future provincial and ultimately national peace agreement. Cosatu realised that it needed to pursue a provincial peace initiative which would necessitate the involvement of the top leadership of Inkatha, including Chief Buthelezi. By virtue of being a localised initiative the Umfolozi Accord had only involved regional Inkatha leadership. Being a hierarchical organisation however, its directives ultimately came from Chief Buthelezi. As he had not participated in the process, he in consequence did not endorse it. Indeed Vilane believes he deliberately did not engage as he was not yet ready to call a halt to Inkatha’s aggressive recruitment campaign. Vilane observed too that although Inkatha was involved in committing atrocities, it did not want to be publicly associated with such acts. It was this concern to appear reasonable and accommodating that Cosatu relied on to bring the leadership to the negotiating table. The Umfolozi Accord thus provided the basis for the evaluation of inadequacies in the strategy and provided the foundation for a provincial and ultimately a national peace agreement. Almost immediately a provincial peace process was initiated which involved industry throughout the province and included the top leadership of Inkatha. The provincial initiative ultimately prepared the way for a national initiative owing to the spread of the violence to the Transvaal. This culminated in the signing of the National Peace Accord (NPA) in September 1991 which included all the major political parties, including those in Bantustans, and Cosatu. It included a code of conduct for political organisations, and the security forces, and agreement on a range of mechanisms to halt political violence. The NPA had weaknesses, and the violence did not completely cease but it created a climate where national political negotiations could unfold allowing for a transfer of power from the Nationalist Party to a Government of National Unity in 1994.[138]

7. Union culpability?

Abel asserts that the peace negotiations went nowhere.[139] Numsa people involved in the peace processes believe otherwise. Mabayakhulu, who felt the brunt of this violence, asserts that, “These meetings and processes were partially neutralising the IFP because by engaging them you made it more difficult for Buthelezi and IFP to have reasons to openly go and attack the progressive forces. Without this initiative a lot more damage would have happened.”[140] He believes that all the failed peace attempts ultimately allowed for a serious peace process which included a reconstruction focus. He also contends that the logic behind the peace approaches was correct in that it involved a multi-pronged strategy which included direct engagement with the IFP to `neutralise them`, isolating people in the IFP who were behind the violence, and promoting moderate leaders in the

IFP in order to influence its thinking.[141] The Joint Working Group had to proceed with extreme caution and to execute a delicate balancing act. People needed to defend themselves yet simultaneously it was important to downplay the call to arms. Defensive activity had to be contained to prevent an outright military confrontation which would result in an escalation of the civil war. Erwin believes the JWC managed to maintain some kind of balance by,

> ... keeping channels of communication open for peace. These things are only coming to proof now. They prevented an outright polarisation of the conflict. We kept peace on the agenda and we worked to isolate violence on the IFP side. Later on we had to deal with certain serious problems in our own ranks - undisciplined, spontaneous violence, sometimes organised, but totally a-political violence. On the ground in isolated areas the JWC on a broad political level was able to prevent a massive conflagration of violence - Empangeni, 'Maritzburg, all over the country. The 7 day war would have been a 20 day conflagration if we hadn't taken some steps.[142]

It is obviously difficult to measure the impact of the different peace interventions, but questions of power impacted on both sides' willingness to come to a settlement. If there were to be trade-offs, Cosatu/ANC needed to be assured that Inkatha would cease to spread its influence through force. Inkatha too had to be assured that it would not be marginalised in a future political dispensation. Cosatu and the ANC leadership worked hard to convey this impression through their peace efforts despite resistance from their membership on the ground. The 1994 democratic elections were a testimony to the ultimate success of this strategy.

The war was to have the effect of cementing the Cosatu/ANC alliance in action. Both were forced on the defensive through the onslaught by Inkatha on their ranks. A combined strategy was essential for survival, and in resultant reconstruction attempts it was natural that they should combine to forge policies for the rehabilitation of the region and the country as a whole. As will be later described, Numsa attempted to influence this process by proffering a reconstruction programme which developed the ideas in the Freedom Charter without constituting it as a major `workerist` or socialist challenge to the more conservative forces in the ANC. Thus the war had in many ways assisted in diluting the socialist politics espoused by Cosatu and in particular the union that most forthrightly championed such policies, Numsa. In this respect Inkatha and the state had prevented the emergence of a more left leaning future democratic state. The state had also succeeded in profoundly weakening most civic structures in the region, and indeed throughout the country. Thus a future ANC government would be obliged to rule without significant input from its grassroots black communities. This would obviously have consequences for future programmes to alleviate poverty as in the main the poor had no voice.

Erwin commented that, "It was a very sad war, that's at least 10 000 people who died who shouldn't have died. Horrifying war"[143] (The figure is more generally set at 20 000, for example *Business Day* March 23, 2004 although exact numbers of deaths have never been accurately

recorded) Yet were the unions without political blame? Could the violence have been averted, or lessened, if the unions had acted sooner? Erwin also commented that, "The Natal violence ...was inevitable"[144] There is obviously a measure of truth in this although a failure to take Buthelezi and Inkatha as a sufficiently serious KwaZulu phenomenon meant that Fosatu and Cosatu made some serious strategic errors. It was always understood that Inkatha, and its head, Chief Buthelezi, were more so than in any other homeland a potentially formidable threat. This resulted in Fosatu going to considerable lengths to include Inkatha in its Natal organising efforts. Yet it did not organise around this insight. As socialists who held sympathy with Gramsci's writings this was surprising. A sizeable portion of Gramsci's writings had focussed on the `The Southern Question` which concerned how to realise the revolutionary potential of both the industrial working class located in the north of Italy and the unorganised and exploited peasantry of southern Italy. Whilst the impact of fascism was being most visibly experienced in the rural south, communists strength was located in the cities. He was deeply critical of the PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano) because it ignored the oppressed peasant masses of the South. Gramsci believed that the answer to the `Southern Question` was for the PCI (Italian Communist Party) to "elaborate a programme for a worker and peasant government which can satisfy the mass of peasants..."[145] He noted that, "The Southern peasants... as a whole... don't have any autonomous experience of organising themselves"[146] and that a lack of unity existed between the industrial North and peasant south. In order to overcome this organisational weakness he believed that it was the proletariat's duty as the main revolutionary force to establish its hegemony over the peasantry to counteract that of the `clerical/intellectual strata` and `petit-bourgeois cliques` that dominated rural villages and to enable it to reach its revolutionary potential. This hegemony should however incorporate the express problems and demands of the peasantry, "The binding together of clerical/intellectual strata [in the south] could be dissolved so as to arrive at a new liberal-national formation by accepting their (peasant masses) elementary demands and making these an integral part of the new programme of government."[147] The PCI's role would be actively to assist in the development of self-educatory organisations in the South which Gramsci referred to as "Associations for the defence of the peasantry".[148] Gramsci's appreciation of the necessity of uniting worker and peasant struggles led him to abandon the purist Marxist-Leninist position where the exclusively proletarian party kept itself isolated from the corrupting groups of `non -believers`. He noted that "the problem of worker/peasant relations is not only a problem of class relations, but also a special territorial question, that is, is one of the aspects of the national question."[149] He advocated that the Party should include the peasantry in any effective revolutionary movement, and that it must view itself as an educator and an intellectual. He emphasised the need for the PCI to make closer contact with peasants, shepherds and fisherman in the agricultural South and to create a widespread awareness of the Party and its slogan `for a workers' and peasants' government` as part of a national programme of unity.

The South African context obviously differed from the Italian one in the early 1900s. The

peasantry in Italy was large and significant unlike the large white commercial farms which were responsible for much of South Africa's agricultural output. In South Africa the peasantry had for the most part been shunted away to impoverished homelands, and did not occupy the sizeable portion of arable land that the southern Italian peasantry did. Nevertheless the KwaZulu homeland occupied a sizeable portion of land which accommodated thousands of rural Africans. Yet the Fosatu unions did not attempt to win them over to their socialist project despite opportunities to do so and despite stronger links into the rural areas than those between the Italian industrial north and the agricultural south. Mamdami has coined the term `the rural in the urban` to describe Zulu migrants residing in hostels in urban areas, particularly the Witwatersrand, and has commented on Fosatu and Cosatu's neglect of this constituency.[150] Extending this observation, I would contend that Fosatu neglected the rural constituency from which these workers emanated. Mawu, for example, with its extensive networks and influence in the hostels on the East Rand was ideally placed to educate migrant workers on socialist concepts which embraced a worker/ peasant alliance. It was in a position to influence such migrants who still had strong connections with their rural homesteads to establish "self-educatory organisations" or "Associations for the defence of the peasantry" on their return visits to the homelands. Such educative initiatives could have been realised in the seventies and early eighties without constituting a direct threat to Inkatha. The unions however did not take advantage of this direct connection to the homeland peasantry and thus lost the opportunity to win the peasantry over to its socialist viewpoint. The ANC also failed to appreciate this link and after the breakdown in its relations with Inkatha in the late seventies, in similar manner to the unions, did not take Buthelezi's expanding influence sufficiently seriously. This attitude was to persist. Buthelezi ever quick to take offence, nevertheless pinpointed this reluctance when he complained that,

> When [Nelson] Mandela was released he phoned to say he wanted to come and see me and the king about the violence. It never happened. He told some amakhozi [chiefs] the ANC `almost throttled him` when he raised the idea. A year later [1991], a meeting of ANC and IFP delegations decided Mandela and I should address a joint rally in Pietermaritzburg. Then we learned Mandela wasn't coming , and that Harry Gwala took a busload of ANC leaders to Johannesburg to say he shouldn't come.[151]

On its part the UDF attempted to organise Natal constituencies but in the main limited its efforts to the larger townships. All three organisations failed to acknowledge the specificity of the Kwa Zulu homeland as not just one of the eleven Bantustans but as `a special territorial question, that is, one of the aspects of the national question`. It must be said however that there were attempts by the unions, particularly Mawu and Numsa, to extend political education into rural communities. This was apparent, for example, in the Northern Natal area, but such initiatives were limited. When viewed from Gramsci's revolutionary perspective it becomes clear that the Fosatu socialists were ultimately not thorough-going revolutionaries in either the `gradualist` or `immediatist` sense. Their perspective was narrowly focussed on the industrial working class without reference to other aspects of its existence and their inability to see the potential to educate the rural peasantry was in

fact merely an extension of their refusal to engage with community politics. The intellectuals in Mawu and Numsa, both black and white, were hampered by their urban perspective on organisation and this perspective came to dominate the organisation as their focus on their migrant constituency declined. They were further hampered by the absence of a working class programme which they often promised to develop. If such a programme had been conceived it would inevitably have had to confront workers` relationships to their communities beyond the workplace, including to their rural homelands and the land issue which was for many migrant workers an alternative source of wealth. Without a programme to harness its organising objectives to, it would have been difficult to extend its socialist beliefs to include the rural peasantry and its migrant members' relationship to this constituency.

Part 2: Civil war in Transvaal

1. Introduction

The previous section documented the dilution of both Cosatu and Numsa's socialist aims. This was effected both through the strengthening of the bonds between labour and the popular liberation movement in the form initially of the UDF, and later the ANC, and by serious divisions within the black working class and peasantry. Fantasia has pointed to the primacy of unity as the source of the oppressed's power viewing `militance and solidarity' as `the ultimate base of working class power`.[152] V.L. Allen contends that it is through such unity that socialism expresses its opposition to capitalism, "Solidarity, equality and democracy express the antithesis of capitalist values and are the essence of collective action ... individualism, the core of capitalist activity, is confronted by collectivism ."[153] One of Numsa's remarkable feats had been its ability to forge a national solidarity between metal workers. In the early 1990s however it was to be confronted by deep divisions between workers in the Transvaal PWV area (Pretoria/ Witwatersrand/ Vaal) in violence that would claim at least 14 000 lives in the area.[154] McCun in analysing the acquisition of working class and trade union power, refers to such factors as racial cleavages and the rate of unemployment as affecting the capacity of the working class to unify itself, and to forge common interests in relation to other classes.[155] Thus it was in South Africa that working class power was weakened by the fracturing of solidarity along ethnic, and migrant versus urban cleavages. This was inevitably to undermine Numsa's power to pursue independent policies and to unify workers under the banner of a socialist programme. The reasons for the outbreak of conflict in the Transvaal were multifarious but as will become apparent tensions around economic, political, and ethnic factors were triggered in an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, criminality and instability. There is no doubt however that a mobilised Inkatha was present in much of the conflict and its involvement has been noted in 75 per cent of violent incidents.[156] The availability however of township, hostel and squatter communities to participate in the violence went deeper than the militaristic actions of Inkatha would account for. Kynoch has noted that a pattern of urban

township violence had manifested itself since the late 1800s in the Transvaal and that "politicised rivalries found fertile ground for escalation partially because a culture of violence was already ingrained in township society" [157] It is difficult to identify when exactly conflict erupted on a significant scale as a number of separate instances have been recorded in different parts of the PWV. From late 1989, however, a cycle of violence swept through the area and was to become a feature of township, and in some cases factory life, until the 1994 elections.

A number of studies have also documented major changes that were unfolding in black communities on the PWV in the late 1980s and early 1990s which were seriously to undermine the previously good relations between township residents and hostel dwellers. An influx of unemployed residents into hostels was noticeable chiefly as a result of the repeal of influx control laws in 1986, whilst conditions in hostels declined from the mid-1980s through neglectful local government. Simultaneously migrant workers were being retrenched in large numbers as East Rand industries declined further. Overgrazed land and widespread stocktheft meant that a return to impoverished reserves provided little alternative for retrenched workers attempting to eke out a living. As Bonner et al comment, "The migrant lifestyle was thus being corroded at both rural and urban ends ... An incendiary situation existed in the hostels."[158] For retrenched migrants the newly de-regulated taxi industry offered economic possibilities but this source of income was threatened by rival township taxi associations operating the same routes. Numsa organiser Elias Monage recalls, "Violence [on the East Rand] started as a taxi war. There were two associations. The Germiston one was mostly Zulus, the other one was the township boys... There was a fight. They used different hooters to distinguish themselves, more like an alarm. When they come, you can work out which is for Zulus and which is for local guys."[159] Rural poverty and the breakdown in influx controls had led to the growth of large urban informal settlements. The most significant group of migrants to the East Rand to settle in established squatter camps originated from the Eastern Cape. Thus the situation arose where large numbers of Xhosa speakers, whose political affiliation lay with the ANC, came to live adjacent to Inkatha controlled hostels. These shack dwellers existed on the margins of township life - poor, often unemployed and were subject to the arbitrary and unpredictable actions of the authorities. Political structures were unstable in squatter communities and often representatives did not emerge from accountable structures which gave rise to authoritarian tendencies and ethnic tensions. Following the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 expectations of change were heightened, and a flurry of political activity ensued. This highlighted for adjacent hostel dwellers their sense of exclusion from the township world. Thus an unstable political climate existed which lent itself to the eruption of violence.

2. Numsa: targeted offensive

Numsa members, who were most numerously employed in the PWV area, were inevitably caught up in this violence. Richard Ntuli, a Numsa East Rand organiser, commented that, "If you move

around here [East Rand] most of the industry is in steel, so it was our members who were getting killed. It was Numsa members dying most of the time."[160] As in Natal, Inkatha placed Numsa in the ANC camp and the union became a target of violent attacks which aimed to weaken Cosatu.

Bonner et al identify three stages in the evolution of violence on the East Rand namely the taxi war which unfolded mainly in Katlehong in the late 1980s; the ethnic conflict between Zulu and Xhosa in Thokoza and Katlehong in the early 1990s; and the war between the IFP and ANC, otherwise characterised as conflict between township and hostel dwellers, which engulfed the entire region between 1993 -1994.[161] Certainly trade union members were victims of all three stages of the violence being numerously employed on the East Rand, but targeted attacks on Numsa members at times assumed a different pattern from Bonner's periodisation.

The first stage of orchestrated violence occurred in 1989 when Uwusa began a campaign to extend its influence into the trade union sphere and to coerce Zulu migrants, some already members of Inkatha, to withdraw from Numsa and join Uwusa. Thus unlike the violence which was to erupt between Inkatha migrants and Xhosa squatter communities in 1990, in the labour arena, in the beginning at least, it was Zulu-speaking union members who came under attack. According to Alfred Woodington, an organiser and later head of Numsa's social work department, "Uwusa would decide that their membership in one factory was low so if someone Zulu was obstructing them, they'd target him. If you were a shopsteward linked to KwaZulu/Natal then you become a target because the argument was that Cosatu was against the Zulu kingdom which is under threat."[162] Township/squatter/ hostel battles were more diffuse in origin but Inkatha attacks on Numsa members appeared as a targeted and planned offensive.

Inkatha utilised the presence of Uwusa in the workplace to extend its recruitment campaign and to undermine Numsa. Uwusa threats to Numsa members were sometimes verbal, sometimes intimidatory, and at times overtly violent. Woodington recalls the range of pressures with which Zulu Numsa members had to contend,

> Sometimes [Zulu] members came into a Cosatu local and reported, `I received a message that I must not sell out my nation` and `Cosatu is buying guns to kill our chief'... then people would say, `But there is transparency in this union. I know where the money is going...` Then you find someone is shot at the hostel and no-one knows who shot him. Or you'd find that a homestead in the rural areas is suddenly burnt down, or his family is under attack, or killed... Then the chief would go to the member's family and pressure would come from the family to change their behaviour because what they are doing is a threat to our culture and kingdom. That was the kind of strategy that was used.[163]

If the threats and intimidation failed, violence ensued. The targeted person was shot at the bus-stop, the taxi rank, outside the hostel, or on the factory property. Woodington continues,

> It was terrible times especially for Zulu members of Numsa. They were called `sell-outs`, and they were under constant threat. We would tell a Zulu comrade `Resign from Numsa

> and join Uwusa but our working relationship remains the same.` And those members played a vital role as they provided a lot of information on how to counter violence. Prior warning that the following things are being planned - there was a meeting in the hostel. Some people had no choice but to join Uwusa because they were all living in hostels together.[164]

Uwusa would typically target a large company, in similar manner to Alusaf in Northern Natal, where it had few members and Numsa was in the majority in order to destroy Numsa's base and subsume its membership. Uwusa attacks were often associated with Numsa industrial action which rendered employers less willing to act against Uwusa members or to intervene, and in some cases they actively promoted Uwusa. Scaw Metals and Haggie Rand were such companies.[165]

Uwusa targeted Numsa members at Haggie Rand, a strong Numsa company on the East Rand, in late 1989 during a Numsa overtime ban over the issue of job grading . In September 1989 workers at Haggie told how `a gang of Uwusa supporters` knocked off early. Twenty minutes later Haggie nightshift workers were attacked at the station leaving Msimbu Ntenga, an active Numsa member, dead. The next morning night-shift workers were again attacked, and one badly injured. Numsa members threatened to strike until management solved the problem and an agreement was reached for Uwusa and Numsa to work towards peace. A few days later, Moto Radebe, a Zulu Numsa shopsteward was gunned down outside his home. Terrified workers started to leave work in large groups. Soon after a Numsa member, Dumisani Mngcongo, was shot at his home by unknown gunmen. In response reprisal attacks on Uwusa members were conducted and one was shot and another burnt to death.[166] Uwusa was however unable to rupture workers' unity. As a Haggie shopsteward commented, "Workers will not join Uwusa, because it does nothing for them on the ground. Sometimes you find workers who are a bit reluctant during industrial action - Uwusa will target those ones. One or two workers will respond to this idea of the Zulu nation."[167] It was during the August 1992 three week national engineering strike that Uwusa-related violence again erupted. Six Haggie Numsa members were killed by five Uwusa assailants who were subsequently identified but not apprehended. Reprisals resulted in the killings of three Uwusa members and Numsa assailants were found guilty and sentenced to between 12 and 28 years.[168]

In 1990 attacks of various kinds intensified following the release of Nelson Mandela. It is difficult to identify precisely where and when the heightened conflict began because it had an extended lineage and trajectory. Numsa's experience suggests it went through several phases before exploding into full-scale civil war. Some[169] identify the onset of violence in the Transvaal as being the attacks by Inkatha members on Numsa workers in the Sebokeng Hostel in the Vaal in June 1990. A Numsa briefing document noted that a month before on May Day, Jay Naidoo, Cosatu general secretary, had made a speech in Cape Town in which he criticised Chief Buthelezi. Inkatha responded by requesting its members to resign from Cosatu. Thereafter it records, "A pamphlet

written in Zulu was distributed in the Vaal Triangle stating that Mr Ndlovu of Kwa-Zulu government has requested all Zulu to resign from Cosatu as King Zwelithini and chief Buthelezi had been insulted."[170] In April 1990 the 7 Day War had erupted representing the worst violence in Natal up to that point. It was in this context that the first attack by Inkatha and `white men some in SADF uniforms, and all wearing balaclavas` on Cosatu workers on a large scale in the Transvaal was conducted. At 3am about 200 -300 people attacked the Sebokeng Hostel in the Vaal township of Sebokeng. They began shooting and as workers ran out of their rooms they were shot down and stabbed by people shouting `Usuthu` who wore headbands and were believed to be Inkatha members. At the time Usco (Union Steel Corporation), Tosa (a Dorbyl subsidiary) and Samancor workers were on strike, and a strike ballot was taking place at Iscor. At least 19 Numsa members were murdered in the attack. As a result Usco workers called off their strike.[171] Numsa urged the companies concerned to participate in a joint investigation by lawyers. The companies refused.[172] Thereafter escalating attacks on Numsa members shifted to the East Rand.

With the tripartite alliance stayaway call on 2 July 1990 which attacked Inkatha and its leader Chief Buthelezi, and the launch on July 14 of the Inkatha Freedom Party, the violence took on a political and ethnic aspect as Inkatha began to mobilise on an ethnic Zulu ticket. In August, Khalanyoni Hostel Inkatha members began a forced recruitment campaign and the first bouts of violence between ANC Xhosa Phola Park residents and Inkatha migrants erupted.[173] In the process the hostel was raised to the ground and migrants came to believe that ANC supporters wanted to obliterate hostel and migrant culture. Migrants reacted both through intensified attacks on Phola Park squatters where 150 were killed, and through the eviction of Xhosa migrants from hostels.[174] Over time such ultimatums came to encompass non-Inkatha supporters from a variety of ethnic groups. Numsa members were informed by Inkatha in numerous hostels such as Jeppe, George Goch, Denver, Merafe, Benoni, Vosloorus, Katlehong and Nancefield, that they should resign from the union or face death.[175] It should be noted that a change in the demographics of hostel dwellers in this area had occurred since Mawu first recruited migrant workers in large numbers in the early 1980s. Many migrants from overpopulated, impoverished homelands such as Lebowa, and the Transkei had become urbanised and moved into the townships with their families. Zulu migrant traditionalists more commonly however, continued to view their time in the urban areas as a temporary sojourn and their families frequently continued to reside in KwaZulu. The system of land control in Kwa Zulu supported this choice as migrants stood to lose land if they did not maintain the link with the rural homestead.[176] Thus, by the late 1980s, the hostels were dominated by Zulu migrants and unemployed work seekers.[177] This meant that the workers who came under the most intense pressure to resign from Numsa were the union's Zulu migrant members. They were viewed as traitors by Inkatha traditionalists. Numsa's Zulu migrant members responded in different ways. They either came to identify with Inkatha's project, or resisted it, or under pressure from Inkatha withdrew from the union. For those who came to identify with Inkatha, a genuine

logic existed and it was not simply a matter of intimidation by a warlike Party. Inkatha leadership was skilled at exposing the Achilles heel of the Cosatu unions. As previously described, the haemorrhaging of jobs, particularly on the East Rand, was a constant spectre for workers. Inkatha played on this fear. Its conservative anti-sanctions stance had been premised on the notion that a call for companies to disinvest would lead to further job losses. Such arguments held resonance for unskilled migrant workers who felt intensely vulnerable. Numsa's inability to stem the flow of job losses, and at times its poor servicing which left retrenched workers with inadequate severance packages or under-representation when job cuts were mooted by companies, estranged some workers from the union. Inkatha thus provided a form of support in a fraught working environment.

In the course of these struggles many non-Zulu migrants fled from hostels to nearby townships and squatter camps and by 1992 Inkatha was hegemonic in the hostels. Adjacent communities who mainly identified with the ANC were drawn into reprisal attacks on hostel residents. `No go` areas or `dead zones` became a feature of township life and fierce battles unfolded between township and hostel residents. Township residents relied for protection on Self Defence Units (SDUs) which consisted of militant youth often linked to returned Umkhonto we Sizwe operatives, whilst Inkatha hostel dwellers were organised into traditional Zulu warrior groups, amaButho, which were linked to other hostels through a web of indunas (izinduma) or headmen who took orders from Inkatha leadership. This network ensured that the conflict spread from hostel to hostel and township to township. Ample evidence also existed that the police and other security forces in the area fomented, and even participated in the conflict, in what became known as the `third-force`. The state had its own interest in shaping the reform process. Security forces encouraged and sponsored criminals in its campaigns against ANC supporters whilst both Inkatha and the ANC recruited criminals in their cause and neither exercised adequate control over these gangs. Some ANC SDUs ran amok and engaged in turf wars with other ANC groups and terrorised the local community. Inkatha-sympathetic gangs too emerged in townships, such as the Khumalo Gang in Thokoza, and engaged in forced recruitment campaigns involving violence and assassinations. [178]

The violence on the East Rand experienced by Mawu/Numsa however had deeper roots and more complex origins than this widely accepted view suggests. Below an investigation of the violence at Scaw Metals provides a diverse picture of a range of factors at play, including company neglect and direct or indirect collusion in the violence, as well as its relationship to the wider East Rand conflict. In the early 1980s Scaw recruited predominantly migrant workers, many of them from KwaZulu. By the mid 1980s its workforce had risen to 4 000 of which unskilled, non-literate migrants constituted 70 per cent, semi-skilled workers 20 per cent and artisans 10 per cent of the workforce. Approximately 1 600 Zulu speakers resided in Scaw's company hostel together with the remaining migrants from the Eastern Cape and northern Transvaal. The launch of Numsa in

1987 was to influence management to alter its recruitment patterns in favour of employing solely KwaZulu migrants. This was a conscious political decision and was based on its perception of Numsa, as opposed to Mawu, as a highly politicised union. In an irony it believed KwaZulu migrants under the influence of Inkatha would be less militant in their politics.[179]

In late 1987, East Rand organiser Richard Ntuli noticed signs of Uwusa attempting to break Numsa's majority. At the time, the head of Scaw's shopstewards committee was Samuel Manyati, an influential KwaZulu migrant,

> Manyati was elected as Katlehong local chair. He was good although he did not have much schooling. He couldn't read and write. He was good at thinking and talking and had experience from chairing meetings at Scaw Metals. Manyati was like a person born to be a king. He could look at people and think and catch quickly what is needed.
>
> Then at one meeting I said to Osborne [Galeni], `Can you hear Manyati's language? There's something wrong.`... Then he was starting, `Mawu is now no more, there is a new thing Numsa, Mawu is dead'. He was trying to take workers to Uwusa. He was taking this thing of Buthelezi of organising the hostels against the people. He was influenced. Manyati was always called to meetings at Kwa Zulu/Natal, every Saturday he was going to Natal. I said to the local we must do something, we must elect another chair. So we elected Osborne [Galeni] as the chairperson.[180]

Soon after at a general meeting, according to Ntuli, Manyati again attempted to turn workers against Numsa,

> Workers were saying things like `Osborne from Numsa failed at Dorbyl, and Ntuli at Litemaster` and this one failed here, and that one there. In Katlehong we had called a rent boycott and the Scaw guys were there in support of the boycott. They started to say `see Mr Ntuli is no longer taking up union things, he's turning into a politician.` And I said `Nonsense, we can't go to work whilst our kids are being killed.` So, at the meeting, I just started from scratch and explained what Numsa was, and Manyati left with no support and everyone joined Numsa again.[181]

Thereafter, in 1987, Scaw workers voted out office bearers who were covertly organising for Uwusa and elected new shopstewards. Ultimately Uwusa only gained 300 members. Organiser Ntuli's and other shopsteward's rapid intervention in neutralising Uwusa's influence in the factory was important. It was not struck by the early Uwusa attacks that plagued, for example, Haggie Rand. The union thereafter worked hard at Scaw to consolidate Numsa's membership. During the August 1992 three week engineering strike a gang of about 50 armed Inkatha supporters from Kwesine Hostel visited Scaw Metals and told workers not to come back to their jobs because they would be killed. Tension was further fuelled by Zulu non-Numsa hostel dwellers providing replacement labour together with white artisans. "This enabled us not to be as badly hit by the strike as we thought we were going to be." commented Allan Murray, a former Scaw Human Resources Manager, and "it infuriated Numsa".[182] The union was confronted with a divided workforce a long way from the worker solidarity which had characterised the 1981 and 1982 strikes when 2 800 workers struck, including Zulu and other migrants. Numsa began to lose its

migrant worker majority at Scaw which was reflected in the bias in its leadership where urban workers predominated.

It was in the third phase of Bonner's periodisation, when the ANC/IFP conflict engulfed the region in 1993-1994, that significant violence at Scaw Metals erupted. Mawu's solid power base in the Scaw hostel, where Numsa now had about 1 700 members, fractured and the violence that ensued became linked into the broader conflict that swept across the East Rand. After the 1992 strike, tensions escalated aggravated by a series of anonymous killings on Scaw's property. In July 1993 a taxi from Durban was hijacked by unknown men on Scaw's private road. Seven Zulu-speaking men, including Numsa members at Scaw, were forced to lie face down before they were shot. Shopstewards believed that the attack was meant to `ignite Zulu hostel dwellers` to attack other Scaw workers but in the event there were no repercussions. Soon after Numsa activist, Zolile Mxhasa, was killed. A delegation of shopstewards attempted to discuss the violence in and around the company but management refused arguing that the deaths had not occurred on company property. A week later in August, 12 workers were murdered and many injured when gunmen opened fire on workers on Scaw's property. [183] National organiser Bernie Fanaroff commented, "We believe the shootings were intended as a provocation aimed at stirring up trouble in a hostel where workers [about 2 000] of different political persuasions have co-existed peacefully."[184] Still management refused to discuss the issue. Instead, it requested workers to invite political organisations to address them at the factory. The union refused knowing this would lead to further divisions amongst workers.[185] The attacks did indeed succeed in `stirring up trouble` in the hostel as non-Zulu, or vocal Numsa hostel dwellers were either forced out of the hostel or killed by Inkatha supporters. Allan Murray remembers, '... one particular guy, a vocal Xhosa-speaking guy, very vocally anti IFP in the hostel, he was outspoken, he got eliminated."[186] Reprisals followed in a cycle of continuing violence. On Easter Sunday 1994 in pre national democratic electioneering a group of Numsa workers were waylaid and massacred. The whole of Cosatu's leadership visited Scaw to try and douse the impending conflagration and to discourage workers from reprisals.[187] In time the hostel became an Inkatha stronghold. Over the course of the conflict, 60 Scaw workers were killed in and around the company. Murray, viewing what unfolded at Scaw Metals, believes that Inkatha on the East Rand initially had the upperhand as it was more prepared for warfare. Later however, after young ANC defence units became better organised and armed, the situation changed. Zulu migrants became isolated in their hostels which increasingly came under siege.[188]

Numsa demanded that management close the hostel to avert further attacks. The company however insisted that it would protect its Zulu migrant workers and keep the hostel open. "To this day" remarked Murray, "I don't know to what extent it was a conspiracy in management... By conspiracy I mean to what extent some elements in our management team were in league with the police, and in league with the third force and we're going to keep this place as it is. In other words,

a political stance. Our public stance was we're going to keep the hostel going. At this point we're not going to close it just because of demands."[189] The 1 200 Zulu hostel dwellers were also stridently demanding that the company allow them to stay in the hostel. The hostel, according to Murray was "...turned into a fortress. It was barbed wired, hyper security. You couldn't just come into the hostel."[190] Initially allegiances in the hostel were not uniform. Some Zulu speakers remained neutral and uninvolved in politics and remained inactive members of Numsa. Others, in fear, resigned. Over time, with an influx of new migrants, a traditional induna-type leadership took over the hostel. These indunas were the conservative leadership that Mawu had first confronted in factories, and replaced with shopstewards, in the early days of organising the union. This traditional leadership was mainly concerned with defending Inkatha and Zulu workers against attacks but after the launch of the IFP a non-Numsa IFP military core emerged which viewed the hostels as a cog in an IFP war. This hard core military formation was not only dedicated to defending Inkatha members, but was dedicated to discharging higher IFP instructions which entailed the aggressive spread of Inkatha's influence. [191]

The union persisted in its calls for the hostel's closure. It informed management that on worker intelligence it had knowledge that arms were being smuggled and held in the hostel, maybe for even wider use in the East Rand war. Murray commented that, "To this day I don't know if it was true" and then in a contradictory statement asserted that, "Zulus had arms as they were protecting themselves and it became a stronghold... Arms were being smuggled in and out of the hostel. There were trains coming by. We had one police raid where they did discover arms. Found ten AK47s."[192] The company was not prepared to conduct hostel raids and was not willing to take Numsa's complaint seriously. Murray believes that some people in management were openly sympathetic to, and collaborated with, the IFP,

> There were some right-wing colleagues in our management. One in particular who was in charge of security. I was not in security. I don't know to this day to what extent he was. But he would've been himself very, very sympathetic to the Zulus and linked in possibly to the third force and to government control and manipulation of the conflict. Very, very possibly. If I'd known his politics he would've been. He would definitely have done that. Whether he could have done it in terms of company rules, I don't know.[193]

It was the killing of Numsa head shopsteward Christopher Manyati, brother-in-law to the ousted Samuel Manyati, in 1995 that finally began to shift Scaw management. Manyati had been elected as a strong Numsa Zulu figurehead who was associated with the former power and popularity of his brother-in-law. He had fled the hostel and was living in the township. He was lured back on a pretext and an hour after entering the hostel was found by Murray, who had been alerted, outside the hostel "...killed, he was shot. His brains pouring out on the ground... When we arrived not a soul in sight."[194] A week later seven Xhosa speaking mourners at Manyati's funeral were massacred. Terrified workers refused to continue working and the company came to a standstill.[195] Scaw management decided to close the hostel although even at this point it was reluctant, but as Murray observed, "We would have faced unbearable pressure [from Numsa] if we hadn't."[196]

A period of negotiation ensued. Hostel dwellers were afraid to vacate the hostel and move into the township and the amaButho was angered by the potential loss of its military base. Murray described it as "... a balancing act to squeeze the Zulu IFP out of the hostel but not provoke them into death-defying wild retaliation... a delicate operation."[197] Hostel dwellers refused to budge and with funding from the IFP took Scaw to court where they argued that the company was breaking migrants' employment contracts. Scaw lost the case and a period of attrition ensued during which, amongst other things, hostel dwellers were threatened with the turn off of water, and were offered R2 000 to vacate the hostel. A few weeks later, `with Numsa baying at our heads` the hostel was closed. No alternative accommodation was offered to hostel dwellers, and they were forced to find lodgings in shacks and local municipal hostels. The violence, however came to an end.[198] Scaw Metals suffered most acutely from the violence but many Numsa factories were victims of Uwusa's forced recruitment activities. Over a five year period from 1989 until the democratic elections in 1994, larger Numsa factories in the PWV were targets. Soon after the Cosatu June stayaway and the launch of the Inkatha Freedom Party IFP members killed three National Springs workers and assaulted seven others. Violent clashes between workers in East Rand factories followed such as at Macsteel, all branches of Dorbyl, National Bolts, Haggie Rand as well as in a number of factories in Cleveland and Jeppe where both Numsa and Uwusa members were injured or killed. Numsa members were attacked without provocation and injured, or killed, in such factories as NF Die Casting, Screenex, Wispeco, Crown Cork, Boart Hard Metals, Genrec, Chubb Locks, NIP, Haggie Rand and Steelworld.[199] By 1993, when the violence fanned out across the region, attacks began to occur in communities where members resided and where Numsa workers were targeted. The violence also shifted in a significant manner onto trains and their surrounds.

Although train attacks appeared arbitrary to the outsider there were in fact reasons behind this targeting. At certain factories it became unviable for Numsa shopstewards (and other unions) to organise or even to hold general meetings. Thus workers reverted to the old tactic of utilising commuter train journeys to meet, plan and to raise morale through struggle songs. Harassment of activists thus took place both on trains and on platforms. In 1993, for example, Numsa NIP member Harriet Mtshali was targeted by Inkatha attackers at Jeppe Station as she and others returned from a Cosatu march to the World Trade Centre. Witnesses testified to two Uwusa NIP workers pointing out the victims before the attack. Mtshali died. In 1994 George Mushe, a Numsa member was identified by an IFP group on Merafe Station.[200] He was shot in full view of commuters standing on the platform. Faceless vigilantes began targeting `Cosatu trains` for attack. Numsa members Joseph Khabai and Cosmos Mbense were thrown out of trains and killed, and another member, Bengeza Maponya, was killed on a train near Crown Mines.[201] Train related attacks by 1993 had become indiscriminate as anonymous attackers opened fire on commuters on the East Rand. By June 1993 some 400 people had died in train attacks and countless more were injured.[202] Ntuli recalls the retaliatory carnage at the Hokai taxi rank in Wadeville in 1993 following the killing of IFP member, Bheki Sokhele. The killings took place at `knock-off time` thus the IFP functionaries were certain that ANC sympathetic, particularly Numsa, workers would be amongst the crowd,

> One of the most terrible moments for me in my whole time in the union was the killing outside Hokai, a shopping centre and taxi rank, where 32 people were killed and 19 were Numsa members. It was knock off time, 4.45, then the guys came from the railway line at the back of the shops, and others were across the road, and the shooting happened from both sides. Then as people started to run they were shooting left and right at them. It was all working people. People were running trying to get inside the shop. In 10 minutes, 32 people were killed.[203]

It is important however to distinguish `third force` attacks from Inkatha attacks although the police and armed forces clearly utilised the Inkatha violence to shift the blame from themselves and evidence of co-operation between them existed. The security forces conducted their own sinister manoeuvres. Throughout the 1980s the SAP routinely harassed union members and officials, and worker organisations. Police often walked into Numsa offices in Vereeniging and Pretoria, for example, browsed around, and left after a few minutes.[204] They would also walk into strike meetings and harass workers. Once, in January 1990 in Port Elizabeth, five strike meetings were taking place in one building, involving 1 550 workers. Police cordoned off two buildings, and marched Welfit Oddy strikers in groups of ten past a combi with one-way windows. In the parade, police identified 14 workers and charged them with acts of violence and intimidation.[205] Over time however the state's need to create a climate of chaos to undermine legitimate organisation entailed an escalation of violence. In a climate where it was attempting to persuade the international community to roll over its debt repayments it could not afford to be overtly identified with, attacks and killings. It thus developed more masked and sinister forms of operation. In 1986 a fire

destroyed the Naawu and Ccawusa offices in East London.[206] In 1987 vandals broke into the Mawu offices in Krugersdorp and sprayed threats on the office walls. Thereafter they returned to set the office alight destroying all union records. In 1988 East London the Numsa and Cosatu offices were firebombed as were the offices of Numsa and other Cosatu affiliates in Eaton Road, Durban.[207] Later Woodington reported an arson attack in Johannesburg in 1991 at Abbey House the home of Numsa's Johannesburg local office. Rough estimate of damage was "building R100 000 to R150 000, equipment +- R100 000. Organisationally we could easily take four months or more to recover documents, re-establish communication lines, and get the office fully operational."[208]

In the 1990s, however security force activities assumed a more chilling character. Overt police harassment had tended to cement unity amongst the oppressed. Now it aimed to play a divisive role through more brutal and anonymous covert operations. Through the creation of a climate of fear, the security forces hoped to retard organisation as people feared to move around townships and squatter camps and became reluctant to attend meetings and organise openly. Militarised IFP groups obviously assisted in this task but faceless vigilantes were also employed to commit unattributable atrocities. In September 1989, for example, the Numsa West Rand local was initially harassed via continuous police raids and threatening phone-calls. Then shopsteward, Mandla Mahlangu, was found dead in Kagiso township. Six days later Abessai Nkoe, a local organiser, was attacked and suffered serious head injuries. When he returned home he received death threats. Chris Leeuw, a local organiser also received death threats.[209] In 1991 Sam Ntuli, Numsa Wits Regional Secretary, and General Secretary of the Civic Association of Southern Transvaal was assassinated. His murder sent shock waves across the East Rand.[210] He was an important Inkatha target and previous attempts had been made on his life. The Khumalo gang was said to have assisted in the assassination because of Ntuli's active role in organising stayaways which affected Khumalo's taxi business. More than 20 people were killed in two incidents following his funeral.[211] Numsa shopsteward Israel Mobotho's experience illustrates well the nature of this anonymous reign of terror and of its links into the hostel violence. He was kidnapped during a Crown Cork strike on 1990, a day after Ntuli's assassination. Men in balaclavas who spoke both Afrikaans and African languages kicked his door in around 3 in the morning and abducted Israel and a friend and forced them to walk to the nearest cemetery. Here a casspir [armoured vehicle] awaited Mobotho. He was driven to the local Kwesine Hostel. "Sometimes the police would leave people there and hostel inmates would decide whether to kill you or not." explained Mobotho.[212] The hostel inmates however appeared `stunned` and the police thus removed him to a secret camp probably because `... they wanted some information from me.` He was continuously beaten and tortured and accused of killing Sam Ntuli. "The men employed a tube to suffocate me. This was over your mouth and nose closing all the air spaces. It was like a car tube but it had handles. I passed out several times." he recalls.[213] Meanwhile the union had moved into action. It firstly

informed high level ANC leadership of the abduction. “In the process of these beatings while we were travelling back from the mine dumps over the radio they heard that comrade Hani [Chris Hani, Umkhonto we Sizwe high command] was making statements about the kidnap itself, so they stopped the car and beat me for the statements made by these national leaders.” Mobotho remembers. But they began to fear they had made a mistake.[214] Meanwhile Numsa’s Alfred Woodington had received information of a secret camp outside Vosloorus. Organiser Richard Ntuli and three others located the camp and informed other union comrades of their intentions. They disguised themselves and hired a white Toyota Corolla commonly used by the police. They entered the camp and found Mobotho severely bruised and swollen at the back of a building. They threatened the perpetrators with high level exposure if he was not released. He was freed 24 hours later.[215]

The violence and intimidation had the intended effect however. In some factories shopstewards were unable to hold meetings and attendance at union functions dropped dramatically. Meetings were frequently cancelled under threat of attacks and assassinations. At times shopstewards and officials fled the workplace. At Wispeco, Uwusa members attacked Ntuli in the factory, and he narrowly escaped death.[216] Numsa locals crumbled as evening gatherings became difficult and attempts at convening meetings during the day at different venues were made.[217] Union education suffered as educators were drawn into attempts at combating violence. Mchunu recalls his appointment as a Northern Natal regional educator in 1991 but that he undertook very few educative activities except to plan an educational programme in a national education meeting.[218] The union was also confronted with deep divisions between members in Numsa, not only between Numsa and Uwusa workers. Numsa non-Zulu members began to express hostility to Zulu members as they vented their dismay at the killings of innocent members. This was a misapprehension however as many Zulu members were not Inkatha sympathisers. Ntuli recalls his response, “Sotho speakers wouldn’t talk to Zulus. In my area many Zulus were killed. And I’ll say to Sotho speakers, `Kill me now, I’m a Zulu speaker, don’t say we kill them just because they’re Zulu speakers.”[219] The union decided openly to confront such ethnic divisions. Jay Naidoo, Cosatu General secretary, for example addressed Numsa Congress in September 1991 delegates thus, “What is our response? We must expose provocateurs in our ranks. We’ve never had ethnic conflict in our organisation because our organisation straddled that, and bound us together. We must maintain organisation.”[220] In 1990 *Numsa News* attempted to impart some perspective on the ethnic divisions,

> It is wrong that the media, the government and other sources have talked about a Xhosa/Zulu war, faction fighting, and black on black violence, or suggested a battle between hostel dwellers and residents. This is gross misrepresentation. It is an apartheid war against black people. It is a war instigated to reintroduce oppressive measures like the State of Emergency, to attempt to weaken the ANC and its allies. It is also disgraceful for some people to refer to dangerous weapons - guns, pangas, spears, axes and knives as cultural weapons. Whilst we know they are used to brutally kill innocent people.[221]

It was the influence of individual organisers however that was critical in countering divisions. Ntuli recalls his attempts,

> I tried to deal with this openly in general meetings. If you're a Zulu OK, if you're a Xhosa that's it, if you're a Zulu yes - let's not make an issue of something that is not an issue. There was a problem with a company where Zulu and Xhosa guys wanted to kill each other and I just decided if we die, we die, but we must go there into the hostel and speak. ... Go to the squatter camp and talk to Xhosa speakers, then go to the hostel, and so on. And we tell them we are coming you must be in the position of looking after our safety. Then you can report back. Workers are happy if you do this.[222]

3. Peace initiatives

As in Natal, Numsa played an important role in dissipating the violence chiefly because its members were prime targets. It had learnt lessons in Natal and adopted a similar approach where it aimed to identify perpetrators, expose police inaction or complicity, and pursue peace initiatives. Numsa established a crisis unit[223] and in 1990 released Woodington from his organising activities to head the unit.[224]

Anger at police inaction was widespread. Numsa general secretary, Mayekiso commented that, "Police only come to collect corpses, and mostly white police, who don't have the will to stop the violence, are sent."[225] In 1993 Woodington wrote a report which listed the lack of convictions in factory attacks except in the case of Numsa retaliations,

> Haggie
> * 6 Numsa members killed by Uwusa members and 5 assailants identified not convicted.
> * 3 Uwusa members killed by Numsa members, Numsa found guilty and sentenced to between 12 and 28 years.
> * Ingersoll Rand: workers shot and killed. Arrest immediate by Traffic Officers. Case dismissed.
> * Screenex: IFP threatens workers (Numsa) inside company with management's permission. Thereafter 3 shopstewards killed. No investigation.
> * Wispeco: Worker shot and killed. Killers identified and pointed out to police. Police refuse to arrest.[226]

He also outlined why people refused to be witnesses which they would have been at great personal risk to themselves. He gave an example from 1991 where workers on a Germiston train were attacked by four armed men. The pistol of one of these men jammed, and workers, including Numsa member Simon Khomane, attacked him. At Wadeville Station the attackers fled, and an ambulance took injured people to hospital. At the hospital workers identified Albert Dlamini, of Mazibuko Hostel, as the attacker with the jammed pistol. He was placed under police guard but later the police withdrew charges against him. Numsa produced four more witnesses to the attack. The police conducted no investigation. Seventeen months later, owing to Numsa pressure, Dlamini's case was heard in the Johannesburg Supreme Court.[227] Numsa also condemned overt

police complicity, “Numsa condemns the South African Police involvement in the violence that has been sweeping the Witwatersrand townships. The SAP have given protective shields to Inkatha impis, and allowed them to carry deadly and dangerous weapons like spears, pangas, guns, axes and sharp instruments intended to kill... The government forces had all the powers to quell the violence, but preferred to side with the forces of destruction...”[228] Ntuli had proof of direct involvement, “Guns came from the SAP. I know that because I asked a guy in a hostel, `Can you bring me guns about 10 of them`. It was R10 a gun, and I told him I had R100 and he brought them and we identified them.”[229]

The union had evidence but had no answer as how to force the police into action. Complaining produced few results. Indeed Ntuli recalls one constable’s cynical response, “Mr Ntuli and Mr Alfred why don’t you take over as the police, because it seems like you want to be a police.”[230] It was through combined strategies that the union forced a level of accountability from the police. One of the strategies was to identify perpetrators and if possible apprehend them in the act. This resulted in some astonishing acts of bravery from Numsa members. Ntuli remembers,

> The Peace Committee was taking the trains from Kwesine to Germiston, watching them and identifying which trains had the problem...We would catch the train and then myself and Alfred [Woodington] would do our job in the train. We would tell the police we’re going to be in train number so and so at this time from Boksburg East. Then we’d observe. We would try and get information before we got onto the train - a description of the person from previous attacks. We would then get on the train and wait `til they opened fire then we’d grab them. They would start shooting when the train was between stations in the train so no-one could run. We shout that every one must lie down, then we’d catch them. We had to work out in advance which coach was likely to be the problem and then we’d go to a certain coach, and then sit there and wait and listen, and stand next to people. From the door we could hear the conversation, and you would know which was the right one and you’d sit down with them at your back and listen. Then the minute they start we jump up. We identified Dlamini as a leader of a group who were working in that train. [The arrest of Albert Dlamini is recorded in the IBI Monthly Report October and November 1991]
>
> One day we came from Boksburg up to Germiston, and this side they were not shooting, they were just grabbing people and throwing them out of the door of the train. And that was easier for us because they didn’t have a dangerous weapon. We grabbed many of them and then we’d hand them over to the police, and sometimes they were convicted...[231]

Numsa’s peace initiatives also forced a greater degree of state and police accountability. The union’s peace strategy involved channelling workers’ anger into peaceful responses and building unity amongst workers across political lines. It developed a peace programme around this strategy which included the demand for government neutrality, the implementation of peace monitoring structures, the phasing out of hostels which it demanded should be converted into family units, and the provision of temporary accommodation for those without homes owing to the violence.[232] Initially Numsa shopsteward councils on the East Rand attempted to combat the violence locally. This involved inviting Uwusa to discuss peace and attempting to address the role of the SAPS

which was seen as incorporating "good and bad police" some of whom could be worked with. This yielded some results, for example, Numsa and Uwusa workers jointly identified two suspects, both employees of Scaw, who were subsequently arrested. [233]

Numsa officials, organisers, regional secretaries and the general secretary formed a Witwatersrand-wide forum to jointly tackle the issue. Woodington was charged with building joint Uwusa/Numsa peace structures in factories where conflict had erupted. These initiatives resulted in the formation of specialised Industrial Area Committees (IACs) to address the violence, which incorporated all Cosatu unions in the area. The IACs elected people to negotiate on behalf of workers in violence affected factories. Some Kew (in Johannesburg) members lost their lives in the process. Through such initiatives Numsa succeeded in mobilising Cosatu into organised resistance to the violence. In 1991 Cosatu initiated peace structures which incorporated representatives from alliance members such as the ANC, SACP, and Sanco.[234] This resulted in joint peace committees in such areas as the Vaal, Germiston, Benoni, Heidelberg, and Katlehong.[235] Ntuli's characteristic fearlessness was crucial in enabling peace initiatives in the Katlehong area,

> The IFP, ANC, everyone must be called to a hall in Katlehong. On the first meeting there was a big misunderstanding because ANC did not really want to meet with Inkatha people because they were killing them, and they were afraid to be seen, and then later attacked. But I told them we were going to meet them and the same thing with the police. At the third meeting, we reached an agreement. [236]

Peace committees actively moved around townships to monitor, and utilise whatever means to reduce the violence. Ntuli records some of the activities with which they were involved and how divisions in Inkatha's ranks were exploited,

> The Peace Committee here was taking the trains from Kwesini ...We would go with the Uwusa people and some were good at that, and co-operative and didn't want the violence. When Inkatha came there was a big fight round the table but the aim was to normalise things and I think we achieved that. Also at Vaal. Talking normally across the table and going out to the people all of us, and people saw us together to cool down the tension. I was the only one prepared to go to the hostel from our side.[237]

Numsa's initiatives were uneven in their success but it attempted to work with anyone who was willing in the Inkatha/Uwusa camp and amongst the police. Woodington recalls,

> ... the Inkatha representative in the Vaal region, Vitas Mvelase, was a person you could talk to and reason with ... In the Uwusa structures there were people who stood out. There was one fellow who is now a councillor in the greater Germiston area - you could work with. There was John Buthelezi an Uwusa organiser who you could talk to... Then there were other elements you couldn't have two sentences with. People like Themba Khoza and Humphrey Nlovu [notorious warlords] would throw obstacles into any discussion.[238]

Woodington spoke of conquering the fear within themselves in order successfully to conduct peace negotiations,

> Themba Khoza in the very first meeting we had to establish the Regional Disputes Resolution Committee of Wits/Vaal, Humphrey, and me and Amos Masondo. They said

> we can't resolve this so let`s go out. We decided to call their bluff and said `OK` and then it changed. Mostly once you showed that intimidation wasn't going to work then they turned around. The key thing we knew, was that they relied on intimidation and fear, and once we could overcome that within ourselves then there was no problem. It was our will against their will, our guts against theirs, so we could reasonably control the kind of discussions.[239]

Ntuli believes that Numsa was successful `in preventing a lot of killing`. Its success he contends was in opening talks to plan with the opposition and confront the police on the role they should be playing. "It was difficult in the beginning" he recalls, "but at the end the police agreed with us. Like we'd say that train coming at 6.10am from Kwesini we want that train to be searched in between there and Germiston. Then we'd monitor and question them `Why you haven't done this?` We still opposed the police but we were pushing them to do their duty."[240] These peace talks resulted, on Numsa's suggestion, in the establishment of the first dispute resolutions committee in Germiston. These committees later became part of the Peace Accord, and functioned in violence-torn regions such as Natal. Woodington was later moved to Numsa head office where a Welfare Department was created. The Department assisted in such diverse matters as diffusing potential conflict, liaising with the police, negotiating with employers to assist with safe conduct to and from work, and assisting violence victims in hospital. At a later date the Department broadened its scope to protect national leaders, and to liaise closely with intelligence structures in the alliance. Woodington believed that, "If Cosatu and Numsa leadership hadn't had such a clear political understanding it could've been a lot worse."[241]

4. Fragmentation of unitary vision

It is evident that peace initiatives reduced levels of conflict, but was Numsa's political understanding as clear as Woodington believed? In the period preceding the violence Numsa concedes that it made mistakes, and the most glaring of these was the neglect of its migrant worker base. In the early 1980s it was in the hostels amongst metal workers that the union built its power base and migrants were fiercely loyal to Mawu. A range of social, economic and political shifts throughout the mid to late eighties however was decisively to alter this commitment on both sides.

By 1983 the union was undergoing a shift in membership. A sharp recession meant that employers over the following three years retrenched unskilled migrant workers in large numbers. Simultaneous with this development the unregistered unions had become more established and township workers commenced joining in great numbers. Fanaroff recalls,

> In the early days township people thought they were much better than migrant workers, and the union was for migrants, and township people didn't need it. And we always struggled to get township people to join and there was always a clear division in the factory. The township people were the stores people and clerks. They were in slightly better jobs. Most workers in the heavy metal industry were migrants or saw themselves as migrants like the guys at Kraft. They weren't Section 10 1(d),[242] they were section 10 1(a)

> but they still had their homes in the rural areas. But once unions became easier to join, and more fashionable, and more successful, the urban workers started to join.[243]

Both Fanaroff and Bird note how in the early days union meetings were conducted in vernacular and migrant factory leadership often comprised respected older men who were not familiar with English. The use of the written word in such items as reports, union recommendations, and policies was also not a significant part of the early union culture. This was in part due to low levels of literacy but also reflected workers' rural roots where oral communication was dominant. As Bird observed, "... people's own roots were in a society where problems and issues got resolved through discussion and meetings. And that was carried through into the union movement. It wasn't a literate tradition, and so I think many leaders that emerged through that period got their status and standing by the wisdom of the way in which they debated."[244] This culture shifted when companies began to employ a more educated, stable urban workforce in accordance with the Riekert Commission recommendations. The union reflected this change when a younger, more educated and militant post Soweto 1976 leadership began to replace the older migrant leaders.[245] Workers started to express the view that `how could you elect a shopsteward who couldn't speak English to the boss?`[246] An organiser from Highveld Steel recalls how "a few who came from townships would come to the hostel for meetings."[247] Now migrants were obliged to travel to the townships or union offices in the city centre to attend meetings. Union officials too became more urban based. Jenny Grice, at the time a National Education Administrator, remembers organisers in the early 1980s returning to their rural homes for the Christmas break but that by 1986 this was uncommon and few officials resided in hostels.[248] Mayekiso also recalls that some migrant members embraced the urban world and vacated hostels, "The trend was against migrancy. People were bringing in wives and kids and moving into shacks, particularly when influx control lifted in 1986."[249] This trend combined with large scale retrenchments meant that migrants became less of a presence in union life. Nevertheless there were still significant numbers residing in company and municipal hostels.

In the post 1986 period the withdrawal of influx control, the upheaval in the townships, and the scarce resources of local authorities caused hostels to fall into disrepair. Over time unemployed work seekers and criminals came to live amongst working migrants some of whom had lived in the hostel for over 30 years.[250] In the process, Sitas comments, "The old hostel committees were undermined, their [migrants'] participation in shop stewards councils declined and instead... a vicious process of clan, `homeboy`, regional positioning ensued."[251] The hostel regime characterised by blackjacks and the tight municipal control that Mandlenkosi Makhoba had described in the early 1980s, collapsed. In fact, no security existed at all and theft was commonplace. Photographer, Greg Marinovich describes the state of the hostels by 1990,

> Enter a typical one, and the dirt and neglect assaulted your senses. Raw sewage from unblocked and broken pipes spilled on to the ground. Uncollected garbage and dead dogs

> rotted unattended. The communal ablution blocks were not maintained and broken toilets rose from reeking pools in stalls that had never had doors. The cold water showers had no doors either, so that those shitting could pass the time by watching those washing. There was no heating, even though temperatures dropped below freezing in winter. In summer the poorly ventilated rooms were stifling and the stench unbearable...Few windows had glass panes and many were covered in plastic, cardboard and corrugated iron. To each side, a door led into an open plan sleeping room meant to be shared by four men, but often as many as 16 were crammed in. Each person had 1,8 by 1,5 metres in which to sleep, but even that was often shared as the beds were occupied in turns by shift-workers...There were no ceilings, just the underside of a corrugated iron or untreated asbestos roof, often in disrepair...Enterprising residents set up a rough stall to sell parts of animals slaughtered somewhere in the hostel, while others tried to make a living by converting their rooms into shebeens... Drunkenness was commonplace...[252]

Segal [253] who also records the degradation of hostels in 1991 from a series of interviews with Numsa migrant members, notes the sense of abandonment experienced by these workers. They articulate strong feelings of alienation from the union and its politics where formerly there had been powerful bonds. Such descriptions render it more than surprising that the union, which was intensely focussed on workers' welfare, had not actively mobilised around the improvement of their migrant members' living conditions tied as they were to contracts of employment. Again, the narrow focus on conditions within the factory and the vocality of its urban members had blinded it to the misery of migrants' lives. In a terrible irony the union had become a victim to the state's divide and rule policies embodied in the Riekert Commission which sought to create an elite sector of permanent urban workers and an impoverished reserve army of labour in the Bantustans. The tragedy was that the union was conscious of neglecting its early power base and of the potential divisions this implied for the working class. As Fanaroff comments,

> The big mistake we made was that as the unions became easier to organise so township people started to join. Then slowly, from about `82, we stopped going to the hostels and stopped having meetings there. And hostel workers were members but they were ignored, and general meetings were in places that didn't suit them, and so on. And then Inkatha got into the hostels and if we hadn't made that mistake we wouldn't have had any of that violence in the hostels that we had later. This was a major strategic error, and we realised we were making it because at various times in the `80s we decided we must go back to the hostels and ensure that migrant workers are properly catered for, must ensure that workers elect them, and we used to preach to workers, `don't elect someone because he speaks English, elect someone who is committed' and so on.[254]

When Numsa and Cosatu finally turned their attention to hostel conditions following the war on the Witwatersrand between August- September 1990, they again ignored the fears and needs of their migrant membership. As previously noted the union called for the dismantling of the hostels and their replacement with family units. Cosatu echoed this call as did the unbanned ANC which called for, amongst other things, the vacating of hostels for occupation by returning exiles, or for use as family units, or for the hostels to be fenced off to prevent violence.[255] As Murray described at Scaw Metals the `fencing off` option did not prevent the violence and merely further contributed to hostel dwellers' sense of isolation. Murray also noted the strong resistance from Scaw Zulu migrants to closing the hostel and the IFP's willingness to finance the legal costs to fight the hostel

dwellers' cause.[256] Many Zulu migrants had no wish to bring their families, who tended rural homesteads, into the urban areas where traditional values would be diluted. Single accommodation suited their needs. Over the years they had evolved a hostel culture, which included extra-marital relationships, which had enabled them to accommodate to their migrant status in the cities. Some hostel dwellers were concerned that they would be forced to bring their families to the urban areas or face eviction. In this threatening environment it was Inkatha that offered support to besieged hostel dwellers. After its launch, the IFP targeted the largest hostels on the Witwatersrand for recruitment and claimed to represent the interest's of Zulu migrants. It championed the retention of single sex hostels and supported the launch of the South African Hostel Dwellers Association (SAHDA) to represent hostel dwellers' interests.[257] It was thus that the interests of hostel dwellers and the IFP coincided at the point where Numsa, Cosatu and the ANC appeared to have abandoned their cause.

Migrant workers interviewed by Segal recorded their alienation from the union's political policies as do other commentators.[258] A migrant, Joseph Buthelezi commented that, "It [Cosatu] was only spoiled by its direct involvement in politics... Most people from Nqutu left the union and joined Uwusa because Cosatu preached disinvestment."[259] Von Holdt comments that "although migrants were at the forefront of many militant shop-floor struggles, they remained a conservative political force."[260] Ruiters however questions this view citing the obstacles to migrant political involvement in urban areas owing to the alienating political style of activist township youth.[261] Youth tended to view migrants as unsophisticated, temporary sojourners in townships who were not worth engaging politically.[262] In stayaways from the early 1980s onwards youth who were rendering the townships `ungovernable` and who were loosely acting under the banner of the ANC and UDF, often attacked migrants for non- participation in political action. This, despite the fact that activists seldom visited hostels, migrants were not involved in, or consulted on, civic structures, their hostel issues were never championed, and they were seldom canvassed in advance of stayaway action or informed of demands involved.

A number of commentators[263] note migrant alienation from successive stayaways in the 1980s and early 1990s. During the 1988 three-day stayaway, many Zulu migrants left for the rural areas to stay with their families (it should be noted that township workers also stayed at home with their families) which was interpreted by township activists as a lack of support for the `struggle`. Youth intimidation had lessened since the emergence of Cosatu's more disciplined influence in stayaways, but youth `monitoring` still resulted in attacks on migrants.[264] It is thus possible in such circumstance to view the actions of migrants as a logical response to the undemocratic and in fact `conservative` politics of the youth. Yet neither the UDF, ANC, or Cosatu ever called the youth to account or attempted to educate them on the potential political importance of the support of this group of workers. Fanaroff's honest admission of Numsa's culpability in the Transvaal conflict,

("And then Inkatha got into the hostels and if we hadn't made that mistake we wouldn't have had any of that violence in the hostels that we had later") is thus probably overstated. The entire mainstream left seems to have fallen prey to an urban bias and the ANC more than any with its `ungovernability call` failed to give youth any meaningful political direction during, or after, ungovernability had been achieved. Cosatu's well-intentioned but ill-conceived June 1990 stayaway confirmed for many Zulu hostel dwellers who had remained loyal to Numsa, that if they had any cultural affiliations to Inkatha they were not wanted in Cosatu. The stayaway called for an end to Inkatha's reign of terror and for Chief Buthelezi to resign as Kwa-Zulu Minister of Police. This resulted in defensive attacks on township activists and consequent retaliatory violence. Yet it should also not be forgotten in the process of apportioning responsibility for the violence that there were a range of material factors at the time, some of which have been described, that contributed to the instigation and fanning of the conflict that was beyond the union's control.

Commentators who have noted migrant workers' alienation from successive stayaways do not however focus on a curious exception to this trend. The PWV November 1984 stayaway, supported by Fosatu, was observed by over 800 000 workers including high participation rates by both township and migrant workers.[265] Hostel dwellers were not `a conservative political force` in this instance and furthermore were willing to support a number of demands that were township and youth oriented in nature. One of the main demands was for democratically constituted Student Representative Councils as well as a range of other student related demands. Significantly however a decision was taken to also include worker and community demands, namely the withdrawal of the army from townships, an end to police harassment, and the withdrawal of rent and bus fare increases. Many of these would have impacted on migrants' lives too as would the worker-inclusive approach. Mawu's general secretary, Moses Mayekiso, who had recruited extensively in the hostels sat on the stayaway committee and a Fosatu sub-committee ensured mandating and report-backs to membership. Worker authority was such that it was able to alter the stayaway date from 30 October to November 5 and 6 to allow workers to collect their pay packets. Mawu's primary target in preparation for the stayaway was the migrant hostel dwellers. Thus migrants were included, informed, and consulted, and youth `immediatism` was harnessed into a more mature, flexible and democratic politics. Under such circumstances hostel dwellers felt convinced enough to participate in the stayaway and to forge an alliance with township workers and youth activists. Fosatu's socialist perspective had enabled the forging of a strong worker unity. Later Cosatu stayaways did not embrace the inclusive approach that had characterised the Fosatu style and migrants responded accordingly. Thus it is possibly to surmise that it was not just a question of hostel dwellers alienation from Cosatu's politics but a deep sense of neglect and of broken trust. Migrants, as in the early 1970s, were again at the bottom of the pile which included the experience of having little ability to influence the nature and content of stayaways or if they occurred at all. Thorough education, which had been the hallmark of Mawu's style in the early days, was now

absent in the hostels. Thus the experience of neglect and betrayal seems to have been at the centre of Zulu migrants' sense of grievance and not per se the union's politics. As Gabriel Ncgobo, a migrant worker, simply observed, "In the course of time Cosatu became more politically than economically oriented. Our problems were not given first as it was the case before."[266]

It should be noted however that schisms between township and migrant workers, and between migrants themselves, was not exclusive to Zulu migrants nor was the militaristic resort to violence. Chapter 7 recorded the internecine violence that erupted between mainly Xhosa Transkeian workers at Iscor and Von Holdt records the conflict that emerged between the more sophisticated township leadership of Numsa at Highveld Steel in the late 1980s and the migrant Pedi hostel dwellers who hailed from the northern Transvaal. Mawu had originally recruited in the Highveld Steel hostels and these migrant workers had formed its militant base. Later, as township workers joined in numbers an articulate urban, mainly Zulu leadership emerged which sidelined the migrant leaders. In an unusual development for the time activist township youth developed a strong relationship with Pedi hostel dwellers. This was in part forged when the youth sought refuge in hostels in the mid eighties when police were hunting down township activists, but was also as a result of a shared political tradition. Pedi migrants emanated from the ANC tradition and had participated in the Sebatokgomo initiated by the SACP and ANC which had launched a peasant' movement in 1955 culminating in the Sekhukhuneland revolt of 1958.[267] The divisive influence of Inkatha was not present. Nevertheless conflict, divisions and ultimately violence emerged between workers. This expressed itself most virulently during, and immediately after, the 1987 wage strike which resulted in a lock out and the dismissal of a number of mainly migrant workers. Migrants were chiefly represented through the Strike Committee which was supported by activist youth who utilised violent methods, usually the sjambok, to enforce strike observance. The official shopstewards committee, and most townships workers, were deeply alienated from this manner of enforcing strike solidarity. A contestation over the meaning of union democracy resulted. For migrants the sjambok constituted the traditional method of discipline used to resolve disputes, or indiscipline, which was authorised by the village headman. For township leadership union democracy was instituted through discussion, negotiation and consultation. Less educated retrenched workers, hostel dwellers and unemployed youth were suspicious of this `talk` solution and in the wake of the strike bitter divisions occurred. This expressed itself in the emergence of two union centres at Highveld Steel and the occurrence of beatings, firebombings of workers' houses, and killings.[268] This violence fortunately did not result in the conflagration that occurred on the East Rand owing to a variety of different forces at play in the township, but does underline how the disempowered, marginalised, and less skilled workers tended to embrace the familiar option of violence. A Highveld Steel Pedi migrant remarked that Zulu traditionalist were no more or less militant than the Pedi who also emanated from a warlike traditional culture.[269] Union neglect of its migrant constituency does not appear to have been a major factor here but the

experience of migrant displacement by more educated township membership, and its concomitant style, was clearly a factor in the conflict.

This Highveld Steel case study also underlines the failure of the union movement successfully to provide alternatives for retrenched membership, or more broadly to address the issue of unemployment amongst the droves of jobless youth. It would obviously be unrealistic to have expected the union movement alone to solve the huge unemployment problem but organising the unemployed was a weakness in Cosatu's political strategy and, for Numsa specifically, a failure in its socialist vision of uniting the working class. Cosatu's National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee (NUWCC) failed mainly due to a general lack of focus on this critical area by its affiliates. "Our biggest weakness has been the failure of our affiliates, regions and locals to actively participate in the organisation of the unemployed." commented *Cosatu News* in 1988.[270] The unemployed remained invisible. No national demonstrations or marches were organised, the deficient UIF was never challenged, organised workers failed to demonstrate solidarity by ensuring that companies employed NUWCC members alone[271], and no systematic political education of the unemployed was effected. Numsa, as described in the previous chapter, did ultimately focus on the unemployment issue in its 1993 programme to restructure the economy which was encapsulated in its three year bargaining programme, but this was late in the day.

5. Conclusion

Woodington commented when reviewing Numsa's approach to the violence that, "The overall strategy was to open up enough space to organise workers and clear up the false propaganda that came out, because the violence had taken us away from the concrete ideological issue of workers' control, non-exploitation, and the political focus on the real issues of class."[272] Numsa's attempts to counter the violence were however mainly reactive. It had already lost the opportunity to `clear up false propaganda`. The schism between the white and black working class was obviously mainly beyond its control but a divided black working class substantially defeated its socialist aims.

The union had neglected in Gramsci's vision of a socialist revolution the role of the ideological struggle. In his view class domination was exercised through popular consensus as much as it was through the threat of, or actual implementation of, physical coercion. The role of education, media, and culture was critical and thus the task of creating a counter-hegemonic worldview, or `an integrated culture` was essential in any struggle for liberation. A socialist revolution, as endorsed by Numsa intellectuals, was an organic process and changing consciousness was an inseparable part of systemic change. Gramsci propounded the notion of an `ensemble of relations` which included politics, economics, culture , social relations and the whole realm of ideology. The struggle to change one element of society was linked to the struggle to transform all other parts.

The assumption behind Gramsci's view of hegemony was that the working class, before it seized state power, must establish its right to rule as a class in the political, cultural and ethical fields. Hegemony was a matter of the degree of equilibrium between state and civil society and any crisis in the established order which would create space for revolutionary transformation must of necessity entail a crisis of ideological hegemony in civil society. Thus the main political thrust of a socialist movement would be to create a `counter-hegemony` to break the ideological link between the ruling class and the general population. This new `integrated culture` would not suddenly emerge but would advance in stages of struggle. To repeat Gramsci's conclusion, "If the ruling class has lost its consensus ie is no longer `leading` but only `dominant`, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies… The crisis exists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears."[273] What matters here is the ability of the left to step into the vacuum and take advantage of the possibilities which in turn depends on the preparation and level of organisation and unity in the movement for change.

Numsa had originally had some success in uniting disparate elements of the black working class such as the solidarity between African and coloured workers particularly in the Eastern and Western Cape and the merging of interests between migrant and urban workers in the union. Later, the union had engaged with admirable commitment in Natal in the non-violent combat of violent coercion by the state in conjunction with sectors of the working class and rural peasantry and in some measure had succeeded in reducing the violence. Cosatu and Numsa had not however succeeded in infusing a dominant ideology throughout the working class. Sections of the working class, all equally oppressed in the political sphere were in dispute with each other. The unemployed were at odds with sectors of the black employed, working class wage earners were in conflict with each other and at times with the youth unemployed, the black rural peasantry was alienated from the organised industrial working class, and racial cleavages separated the remnants of the white working class from the black working class. The opportunity existed to inculcate a counter-hegemonic vision amongst the black working class because of its alienation from the prevailing apartheid ideology which attacked its very blackness. Yet for a variety of reasons which have been explored above Numsa and the labour movement were unable to seize the opportunity. Even within the union itself it had not attained a unified counter hegemonic vision. Organisational weaknesses which were manifesting in Numsa were neglected as overstretched leadership and officials struggled to keep pace with its expansion and the attacks on its membership and the working class in general. Its focus on the everyday servicing and education of its members was diluted and its ideological influence in consequence waned. Gramsci believed that socialist change was only possible when a social class became conscious of its existence as a class and developed a comprehensive world view. The fragmented political landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s rendered it almost impossible for Numsa or Cosatu to attain this unitary vision and Numsa's

socialist project was inevitably weakened by the schisms. Its attention was diverted from its capitalist opponent and it was thrust into an ever closer alliance with the ANC.

Numsa and Cosatu had been caught in a terrible contradiction. The Tripartite Alliance had augmented the power of working people and assisted them to throw off the shackles of apartheid. Despite the state's concerted attempts at destabilising the national democratic struggle to prevent the ANC from taking power, it had failed. This was indeed a victory when it appeared at times that the whole country would be engulfed in violence. The state had failed in the narrow political sense yet it had succeeded in demobilising the trade unions and other organs of civil society both organisationally and ideologically. This was its fundamental, long-term, counter revolutionary success. The power to effect a more fundamental transition was denied the working class. The following chapter further demonstrates the manner in which Numsa made decisive political shifts between 1990 -1994. In these shifts it was less a victim of external manipulations often beyond its control and more a pragmatic player in the political arena. The end result was a dovetailing with the counter-revolutionary strategy of the state where labour's socialist opportunities were much weakened.

ENDNOTES

[1] Buthelezi was chief minister of KwaZulu.
[2] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:130): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[3] "Inkatha: Is your enemy's enemy automatically your friend?" Gerhard Mare *Work in Progress* 60 Aug/Sept 1989.
[4] Webster, Eddie (1979): `A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban` in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 4 No 8, January/February 1979.
[5] Mzala (1988:124) *Mangosuthu Buthelezi: Chief with a double agenda*, London.
[6] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[7] Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa, Johannesburg, April 1996.
[8] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
[9] Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997.
[10] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[11] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:126): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu.*
[12] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[13] "Inkatha: Is your enemy's enemy automatically your friend?" Gerhard Mare *Work in Progress* 60 Aug/Sept 1989.
[14] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[15] "Prison food infested with worms, says Mawu detainee" *SA Metalworker* Vol No 5 Aug/Sept 1986, personal collection.
[16] *Weekly Mail* 26 July 1991; 2 August 1991; 16 August 1991.
[17] In 1986 BTR Sarmcol merged with Dunlop and became known as BTR Dunlop.
[18] The account that follows is a much truncated version of the events that unfolded in this prolonged dispute and the campaigns and legal action that accompanied it. It has been widely covered in journals, books, and the press.
[19] "Monitoring the Sarmcol struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin* Oct/Dec 1985.

[20] Ibid.
[21] "Sarmcol the exploiters" *Umbiko we Mawu* Vol 3, No 3 July 1985, personal copy.
[22] "Union tells shareholders Sarmcol is ` a legend of bitterness and struggle`" *Fosatu Worker News* Number 30 June/July 1984, personal copy.
[23] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[24] Ibid. Industrial court records cited by Abel.
[25] Ibid.
[26] "Interview: Sarmcol BTR strike" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 8 August 1985.
[27] *The Sunday Times* March 15, 1998.
[28] Inkatha as a cultural formation formally constituted itself as a political party, The Inkatha Freedom Party, on 14 July 1990.
[29] Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa, Johannesburg, 1988.
[30] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[31] Bonin, Deborah R (1982): "Class consciousness and conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 - 1987: The Case of BTR Sarmcol Workers" MA dissertation, University of Natal.
[32] Simultaneously Mawu waged an international campaign which saw members and officials visit the European Union in Brussels, the company head office in London, and organiser Geoff Schreiner gave evidence in New York to a United Nations assembly on the British multinational. A play "The Long March" which toured South Africa and travelled to the United Kingdom to highlight the worker's cause was workshopped by a cultural support group and performed by some of the dismissed workers themselves. Support groups also assisted with the setting up of a workers' co-operative (Sawco) (Interview Geoff Schreiner, February 1997; "Tribute to Simon Ngubane - the late COSATU shopsteward and cultural worker" *Cosatu Cultural Worker* (undated); "Mawu egg campaign" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 10 No 8 August 1985; "Apartheid must go, says report" *Fosatu Worker News* No 42 Oct 1985; "Review: Sarmcol workers' play" *South African Labour Bulletin* Apr/May 1986 Vol 11, No 5; "Worker Co-ops" *SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 5 Aug/Sept 86; "Monitoring the Sarmcol struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin* Oct/Dec 1985.)
[33] "Monitoring the Sarmcol struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin* Oct/Dec 1985.
[34] "The biggest campaign ever" *Fosatu Worker News* No 40 August 1985, personal copy.
[35] Ibid; Baskin, Jeremy (1991:130): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu,* Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg; "Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin* Oct/Dec 1985. In Durban about 3 000 Dunlop and Clover Dairy workers marched up and down the busy road waving placards, and bringing traffic to a standstill. About a thousand workers from Hart and CI Industries, demonstrated in the street for an hour. In Jacobs, 300 workers from City Metal Products went on a march. At Machadodorp, workers at Ferralloys stopped work because their management would not send a telex to BTR. Ultimately about 80 per cent of Mawu's factories in Southern Natal demonstrated support for BTR workers via stayaways, marches, and lunchtime stoppages.
[36] "Monitoring the Sarmcol struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin*; "The biggest campaign ever" *Fosatu Worker News* No 40 August 1985; **"**Workers' patience runs out" *Fosatu Worker News* No 38 June 1985.
[37] "Monitoring the Sarmcol struggle" Labour Monitoring Group (Natal) *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[38] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[39] Tarrow, S (1998:19): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
[40] Bonin, Deborah R (1982): "Class consciousness and conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 – 1987, MA dissertation, University of Natal.
[41] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:332): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu,* Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[42] Ibid.

[43] Phineas Sibiya's brother, Micca Sibiya, managed to escape and alert the authorities to the killings. His escape was crucial in challenging Inkatha. Flo Mnikathi, the daughter of a BTR worker and Phineas' girlfriend was murdered with the others. As a result of Micca Sibiya's escape the killers were identified. The attacks were planned by MLA Mvelase. Shiyaboni Zuma, an Inkatha warlord, directed the youth security guards and rode with them to the murder site. Vela Mchunu committed the murders after SADF training. They were never arrested for the murders. (Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.)

[44] Ngubane was a key figure in the production of the `Long March`. Comrades in the cultural group remembered him, "He initiated the whole activity, and persuaded us all to take part in the play. He was the treasurer of the group and he was very inspiring and warm and humble. He was the most disciplined and would always remind us to be faithful to our commitment. Up to the day of his assassination there was never any tension in the group because of his guidance. When he died we were dumbfounded. We lost hope. For about two months we didn't know what to do. But eventually we found a replacement for him, and have managed to carry on. Also, something has happened to us since his death. People like our play even more than before. It is as if his spirit is with us."(*Cosatu Cultural Worker*) The killers were detained for a month and then released. Three years later, an inquest into the deaths of the three, found that nine Inkatha members, including a national organiser of the Inkatha Youth Brigade, Joseph Mabaso, were guilty. The killers despite being identified were never convicted.

[45] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.

[46] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.

[47] Bonin, Deborah R (1982): "Class consciousness and conflict".

[48] 1983: Mawu took BTR to the industrial court and in an out of court settlement the company agreed to negotiate a recognition agreement.
July 1987: Dismissal of strikers went to the Industrial Court. Dismissals ruled fair.
February 1989: Mawu took the case to Natal Supreme Court and argued that the presiding officer in the industrial court was biased because he attended a BTR conference during the case. The court ruled that the case must be reheard by a fair judge. The company appealed against this decision.
March 1992: The Appeal Court upheld the Supreme Court decision and the case restarted in the industrial court with a new presiding officer.
October 1995: The industrial court ruled against reinstatement for a second time and the union appealed to the Labour Appeal Court.
December 1996: The Labour Appeal Court upheld the finding of the industrial court that management fairly dismissed the workers. The workers again appealed to the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein.
March 1998: The Appeal Court decided in favour of the workers and returned the matter to the Industrial Court to adjudicate compensation.
October 1998: The Industrial Court decided on an amount of R13 000 compensation for each worker, or for a dependent in cases of death.

[49] "The Sarmcol Struggle: Ten years on" Debby Bonin *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 19 No 6 Dec 1995.

[50] "BTR Sarmcol - is the struggle over?" Debby Bonin *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 22 No 5 October 1998. The union initiated a number of co-operative and other projects to assist workers to survive in these years. None were ultimately successful.

[51] "Strikers win compensation" *Numsa News* No3 June 1998, personal copy

[52] Ibid; "End of the Long March" *Numsa News* No 4 August 1998, personal copies.

[53] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.

[54] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.

[55] Ibid, p167.

[56] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.

[57] *Weekly Mail* 14 August 1990; 21 September 1990; 2 August 1991.

[58] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.

[59] Bonin, Deborah R (1982): "Class consciousness and conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 –

1987, MA dissertation, University of Natal.
[60] Bonner P & Ndima V. `The Roots of Violence on the East Rand, 1980 -1990`, University of the Witwatersrand Seminar Paper, 18 October 1999.
[61] Bonner, P and Noor Nieftagodien (2001): *Kathorus: A History* Maskew Miller Longman Pty Ltd Cape Town.
[62] The National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee (NUWCC) was launched by Cosatu in January 1987 and was closed in 1991.
[63] Membership in most Cosatu unions lapsed three months after retrenchment.
[64] *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 19 No 6 Dec 1995. This is an excerpt from Qabula's poem.
[65] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[66] Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi to Inkatha Central Committee, December 1987. *Weekly Mail* 11 December 1987.
[67] "A Rocky Path to Peace in Natal" John Jeffreys *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 5, Nov 1989; "Uwusa, Inkatha and Cosatu: Lessons from May Day" Mike Morris *Work in Progress* 43 August 1986.
[68] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:332): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu,* Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[71] "Uwusa, Inkatha and Cosatu: Lessons from May Day" Mike Morris *Work in Progress* 43.
[72] Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[73] "Obituary A `Salt of the earth` comrade" *South African Labour Bulletin* Geoff Schreiner Vol 20 No2 Apr 1996.
[74] Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997.
[75] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[76] Interview Joe Nene, Durban, February 1997.
[77] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:332): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu,* Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[78] Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa, Johannesburg, 1998.
[79] "The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia", Peter Andreas, International Studies Quarterly, 28 (2004).
[80] "No end to violence" *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 1 No 1 February 1990, personal copy.
[81] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:332): *Striking Back.*
[82] "No end to violence" *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 1 No1 Feb 1990, personal copy.
[83] A people at war *Numsa News* April 1990, personal copy.
[84] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:332): *Striking Back.*
[85] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[88] Interview Joe Nene, Durban, February 1997.
[89] Interview Samuel Mthethwa, Durban, February 1997.
[90] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[91] Cosatu Southern Natal Region Report quoted in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 19 No 6 December 1995.
[92] Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997.
[93] Interview Bheki Ntuli, Durban, February 1997.
[94] Interview Samuel Mthethwa, Durban, February 1997.
[95] Telephone Interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.
[96] *Weekly Mail* 14 August 1990; 21 September 1990; 2 August 1991.
[97] "Inkatha: Is your enemy's enemy automatically your friend?" Gerhard Mare *Work in Progress* 60 Aug/Sept 1989.
[98] Interview Jeffrey Vilane, Durban, 1997.
[99] "No end to violence" *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 1 No1 Feb 1990.
[100] `Alusaf` *The Shopsteward* October/November 1992.

[101] Ibid.
[102] "The shifting sands of Natal" G Mare *Work in Progress* 67 June 1990; "Inkatha: Is your enemy's enemy automatically your friend?" Gerhard Mare *Work in Progress* 60 Aug/Sept 1989.
[103] "Alusaf: violence and racism in Northern Natal" Karl von Holdt *South African Labour Bulletin* May/June 1993.
[104] `Alusaf` *The Shopsteward* October/November 1992.
[105] Interview Bheki Ntuli, Durban, February 1997.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] "Uwusa, Inkatha and Cosatu: Lessons from May Day" Mike Morris *Work in Progress* 43 August 1986.
[111] Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.
[112] "War on Natal's Workers" *The Shopsteward* December 1995, personal copy.
[113] Telephone interview Joe Foster September, 2004. According to Foster, Erwin organised the repayment and the R25 000 was repaid about 8 – 10 months later via the ANC in Swaziland.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Interview, October 2003. This unionist requested that his name not be revealed.
[116] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[117] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[118] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69. *"Violence" NC May 1989 Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[119] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[120] Ibid, p209.
[121] Interview Mike Mabayakhulu, Durban, February 1997.
[122] Interview Dumisane Mbanjwa, Johannesburg, April 1996.
[123] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:335): *Striking Back*.
[124] *Natal Witness*, 27 February 1988; Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back*.
[125] Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003.
[126] "No end to violence" *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 1 No 1 February 1990, personal copy.
[127] The report was compiled by a Cosatu working group on the Natal violence and was presented to Cosatu's February 1989 CEC.
[128] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:335): *Striking Back.*
[129] Prior to her death Jabu journeyed to Johannesburg accompanied by a group of lawyers and Cosatu representatives to a press conference to reveal the contents of the 1989 Report. It fingered well-known Inkatha officials and warlords and accused them of planning and executing violence. It was widely believed that the attack on Jabu's house was a direct result of her participation in the press conference. Local warlords knew her residence in Imbali. Jabulani, Jabu's husband and Khumbu, her daughter, were also killed in the attack. Khumbu died saving the life of her young sister, Luhle, by forcing her to run through the flames and out the back of the house. Khumbu was shot as she emerged from the flames. Jabu herself was shot in the head and badly burnt. She lived for 10 days and named her killers before she died. The prime accused Petros Ngcobo, was charged and released despite the linking of bullets found at the scene to his gun. He claimed he had lent his gun to his brother who had died. Her life and death is movingly recorded in Jean Fairbairn's book (1991): *Flashes in her Soul: The Life of Jabu Ndlovu,* (1991) Natal Worker History Project.
[130] Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.
[131] Baskin, Jeremy (1991: 426): *Striking Back.*
[132] "3 million stayaway for peace in Natal" *Numsa News*, July 1990, personal copy.
[133] Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Interview Willys Mchunu, Durban, May 2003 and telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.

[136] Interview Bheki Ntuli, Durban, February 1997.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Telephone interview Jeffrey Vilane, March 2004.
[139] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means.*
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Chapter 13
Evolution of a new politics: 1987 -1990

1. Introduction

Between the period 1987-1994 Numsa's politics underwent significant shifts. The union was continually confronted with the question of towards what political goal it was building power and how to achieve this. Although consensus on the pursuance of a socialist society existed, interpretations on how to achieve this goal differed widely.

The banning of the UDF and other affiliated organisations and the imposition of a State of Emergency in 1986 moved the Fosatu unions, now organised into Cosatu, to the centre stage of national politics. The Fosatu strategy was vindicated as its strong factory floor base weathered sustained attacks which township organisations were ultimately unable to repulse. Numsa was born into this fraught political climate in 1987 and not only did it survive but it flourished as membership soared and worker militancy rose. Although there were moments in 1987 when the state appeared determined to destroy Cosatu it was generally ambivalent about such attempts. It bombed *Cosatu House* where a number of affiliate head offices were based, including Numsa, but the labour movement was now so extensive that attempts to destroy it were impossible and indeed undesirable in the depressed economic climate. Sactu's fate was not about to be repeated.

The scale of organisation also meant that Numsa could no longer control political developments in its ranks in the manner that Mawu and Naawu had previously attempted. The union was overtaken by the rapidity of change and the speed of political developments. In order to ensure it was not marginalised in the unfolding political developments, it forewent Mawu's abstentionism and intervened in order to influence the changing political landscape. In its engagement Numsa leadership demonstrated the Mawu trademark adaptability on the bargaining terrain. Whilst it did not abandon Mawu's socialist perspective, it assessed political interactions in a less instrumental and controlling manner. This involved it in a continuous assessment of how far it was prepared to compromise its independence. Internally and externally the contestation associated with its political vision remained. Its political standpoints were subject to intense debate and were continuously evolving into a new set of questions and political exchanges. In these interactions the formulation of a concrete working class political programme to guide its policies and activities was to remain a constant refrain throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The Mawu 1986 Congress had called for such a blueprint and it remained Numsa's task to fulfil this commitment. Leadership's

ambivalence concerning the development of such a programme would however become evident.

Chapter 11 explored the political standpoints of Numsa's predecessors. This chapter examines the evolution of Numsa's politics in the period between 1987-1990 following the merger of the various metal unions. It explores how the politics of its predecessors was reconstituted and reshaped in vibrant internal debate and in response to changing external political developments and battles undertaken by Cosatu. It examines how in the political arena different tendencies within Numsa demonstrated confluence and divergence and that these tendencies were hegemonic in different areas of union life. In the political terrain the `Charterists` were to emerge as the dominant force whilst in the organisational terrain the `syndicalists` held significant sway in shaping the direction of the union. This duality was clearly demonstrated in the union's approach to the disinvenstment question where the Charterist groups' political position predominated whilst the syndicalists pragmatically managed the fall out from the Charterists unnuanced approach.

Within Cosatu the alliance debate revolved around the nature of organisations that should be included in an alliance and what form an alliance should take. Questions persisted around whether alliances should be constituted as permanent structures which adopted joint programmes and permanent structures of decision-making, or whether, in the interest of maintaining independence, alliances should take the form of limited, issue based co-operation. In this period Numsa was to make definitive shifts in the nature of the alliances in which it was willing to engage. Such shifts were in part thrust upon it by the devastating civil war which engulfed Natal, but also resulted from the pragmatic nature of its politics. The following two chapters explore the nature of the alliances it forged and its groping attempts at forging a working class political programme.

2. Contesting and campaigning

The Freedom Charter: contested terrain

The debate on whether or not to adopt the Congress Alliance's 1955 Freedom Charter at Numsa's 1987 launching Congress immediately resulted in Numsa revisiting the Mawu 1986 resolution on the urgency of adopting an independent socialist programme.

Numsa's inaugural 1987 Congress initiated a pattern whereby it staged its own national Congress immediately prior to the Cosatu national Congress. This was a deliberate strategy in order to prepare positions on issues that it knew would be tabled at the Cosatu Congress and allowed it to participate with clear mandates. Former Macwusa unionists from the Eastern Cape indicated their intention to table the adoption of the Freedom Charter at the 1987 Numsa Congress which was also to be debated at the forthcoming second Cosatu Congress. This propelled Numsa into a serious

discussion on whether this historic popular document which called for a non-racial democracy constituted the working class programme that it intended to formulate and whether it was sufficient to express its socialist intentions. At the Congress a lengthy, robust and at times hostile, and intimidatory debate ensued from which a number of resolutions emerged.[1] The debate which was observed by Cosatu General Secretary Jay Naidoo and the president of the UDF affiliated South African Youth Congress (Sayco) Peter Mokaba broadly comprised three different positions. The largest of these, made up of the ex-Mawu contingency, viewed the Freedom Charter as neither a socialist nor a working class document. It conceded however that the document contained the possibility of more radical alternatives in terms of such clauses as land reform, and popular ownership of the mines and banks and `monopoly industry`.[2] It insisted nevertheless that the Charter did not articulate a specifically worker's perspective. It was this group, Maseremule recalls, which gave substance to the debate. It contended that the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM)[3] had been badly damaged by the State of Emergency and was in a weak and disorganised state. It argued therefore that the MDM needed to rebuild organisation across all sectors in the considered manner that unions had built a labour movement workplace by workplace. The goal of such a programme should be the creation of a mass, socialist movement. This position, according to Maseremule, was narrow in formulation and tended to pursue one principle to the exclusion of all else. Arguments focussed on a limited conception of the working class and avoided practical political discussion around, for example, with which sectors of the working class it would align itself. The second largest group, led by former Saawu and Macwusa members, advocated the immediate adoption of the Freedom Charter.[4] It viewed the first group's position as `a luxury` which had not grasped the urgency of destroying apartheid and establishing a national democratic state.[5] It should be noted however that those who favoured this position were nevertheless concerned to ensure strong worker rights in such a vision. Joseph Sepetla, a Congress delegate, expressed it thus,

> The debate I liked the best when we launched Numsa was the discussion on the Freedom Charter because I thought the Freedom Charter gave us the opportunity to get our land back. I liked the fact that we adopted the Freedom Charter… I also liked the fact that we discussed a Workers` Charter. Through the Workers` Charter workers` interests would not be forgotten. And workers would be placed in the position where they would have a say in the running of the country's economy.[6]

The union was engaging in an old debate in South African political history which revolved around the adoption of a one or two stage revolutionary theory. `The Charterists` advocated a two stage theory which involved the initial attainment of a national democratic state and a progression to socialism thereafter. The ex-Mawu group however interpreted the adoption of the Freedom Charter as a threat to its one stage vision and baulked at the inability of the `Chaterists` to characterise, or analyse, society along class lines. In a later interview, former Mawu member Mayekiso explained how their visions differed,

> We believe that that [working class] programme should contain the maximums and it

> should be built by all sectors of the working class... When we talk of a political programme we are not talking of a Workers' Charter... We believe that the working class must have a political programme, not the workers... The Workers' Charter can answer things that trouble the workers like the right to strike, the right to negotiate, a living wage. Then the working class political programme must answer the question, what is the future society? What is the political set-up of the future society?[7]

The third, and smallest group were committed Marxists who advocated the overthrow of the apartheid state and an immediate progression to worker-controlled 'soviets' as manifested in the 1917 Russian revolution. There were points of agreement however. Both the socialist and Marxist groups agreed that the Freedom Charter in general lacked a socialist perspective.[8] Ngwenda recalls that many delegates, "…believed that it appeased capital, and that it was empty and flowery."[9] Delegates from all factions too, were united in their concern around the ANC's organisational style. As Erwin expressed it, "Their was a great deal of scepticism about the ANC's style of operating with workers, and scepticism about their support for very weak unions, [the so-called UDF and general unions] and whether they truly did understand workers' struggles."[10]

The first part of the debate was characterised by inflexibility and an inability for any of the groupings to make concessions. Maseremule recalls the impact of the interventions of two officials, Alistair Smith and Fred Sauls, in shifting the stalemate. Smith argued that it was necessary to define the working class as broader than that of the industrial working class although the organised working class was clearly in a position to deliver the most decisive blows to the apartheid state and capital. Former Naawu comrades had remained non-committal in the debate and as a result were in a position to play a `sensitising`[11] or mediating role in the debate. Maseremule recalls Naawu's Fred Sauls as having "a prudent reading of politics and could make decisive interventions".[12] Sauls posed a critical question which shifted the debate. Maseremule recalls that he asked, "Is the Freedom Charter open to amendment?...Can we amend it so that we adopt it with the amendments we need to suit us?..."[13] These questions and the debate that followed allowed Smiths Industries' shopsteward Maxwell Xulu to formulate an acceptable compromise. He proposed that Numsa adopt two positions. This entailed the adoption of the Freedom Charter as a set of `minimum political demands` which would be complemented by the development of a more detailed working class programme at a later stage.[14] Such a programme would guide the union in the making of appropriate alliances which would further its aim of establishing `the leading role of the organised working class in the united front alliance`.[15] The union also resolved to discuss the development of a working class political programme in Cosatu. Concern was expressed that the debate had moved beyond regional mandates which had been brought to the Congress and thus a decision was taken to present the compromise at the following Numsa CC in order to give time to obtain mandates. Despite deep mistrust, the compromise was accepted. The differences between camps remained but a bridge had been built. The adoption of the Freedom Charter had cleared the way for a more focussed discussion in Numsa on the forging

of alliances and on the attainment of socialism.[16]

The second Cosatu Congress followed two months after Numsa's 1987 Congress. The two Cosatu titans, Num and Numsa, prepared to do battle over Cosatu's adoption of the Freedom Charter. The NUM had earlier in the year adopted the Charter without reservation. Cosatu leadership, aware of the deep political differences, attempted to downplay the schism as General Secretary, Jay Naidoo's careful diplomatic language demonstrates, "Both emphasise different aspects of the workers' struggle against apartheid and capitalism for national liberation and socialism..."[17] The differences between NUM and Numsa's resolutions centred around the nature of alliances Cosatu should forge. Alliances, NUM believed, should be built with organisations who adhered to the non-racial, Congress tradition. It believed in the broadest possible alliances around democratic and anti-apartheid demands as expressed in the Freedom Charter. It called for the adoption of the Freedom Charter as 'a guiding document' for 'disciplined alliances.'[18] The Numsa resolution acknowledged the importance of building alliances in an attempt to destroy apartheid, but believed this should be effected with organisations committed to both an anti-apartheid and an anti-capitalist position. Such alliances should be based on a clear socialist programme to ensure that other class interests would not supersede working class concerns. Employing the slogan 'March separately and strike together' it argued that Cosatu should forge a 'united front alliance' with organisations committed to 'a non-racial, democratic and socialist South Africa'.[19]

Congress delegates however struggled to envisage to which organisations Numsa was referring. Few struggle organisations expressed socialist aims, or had developed any form of socialist blueprint. Numsa's views were generally regarded as narrow and exclusionary and its position was further weakened by some of its own delegates who expressed support for NUM's views. Numsa received pockets of support but ultimately stood isolated politically. Its resolution received no seconder and the NUM position was adopted. Delegates departed from the Congress feeling deeply divided.[20] Numsa delegate Joe Nene believes that the Congress misunderstood the core of Numsa's argument, "They were thinking that we were anti-ANC while we were not. Maybe it is because we were sticking to the Freedom Charter. If you can read carefully the Freedom Charter, no socialism you can implement with that. We said we could support it if we could amend, but we were told that there is no ways you can amend the Freedom Charter. It is not amendable. It is already adopted."[21] Natal delegate, Mike Mabayakhulu was angered by the crude interpretations of Numsa's arguments,

> So accusations made against us, particularly by Fawu [Food & Allied Workers Union] because they misunderstood our position. We were not rejecting the Freedom Charter because in our Congress in 1987 we had accepted the Charter. We wanted to go more than the Charter, that's all. And we rejected the accusations that we were a workerist union led by white intellectuals... There were obviously people who helped us in terms of the theoretical debates, but we could debate those issues all of us after a thorough process of democratic exchanges within the union.[22]

It was becoming clear that Numsa had been hampered by the lack of a concrete socialist programme which it could have promoted, debated and potentially refined with other Cosatu unions and other alliance partners. Yet it seemed reluctant to embark on a serious process of drafting such a programme. Nevertheless however independent and provocative in its thinking, it was not marginalised. It would play a central role in the development of many of Cosatu's policies. In general a respect was accorded Numsa despite the strong feelings that its political positions engendered and it was generally acknowledged as one of Cosatu's most impressive unions.[23] Its power in the Federation came both from it pragmatic and creative resolution of problems and from its strategic vision. It was also known for its serious and disciplined adherence to Cosatu policies in a manner that few other affiliates managed. Its adherence to Cosatu resolutions on union unity was a case in point.

Contestation and Consensus 1986 - 1989

By the end of 1986 mass detentions and emergency restrictions had virtually destroyed the UDF and township political activity had been all but decimated. In the period 1987-1989 Cosatu and its affiliates emerged as the main opposition force within the country. The huge growth in all its affiliates, including Numsa, rendered it a power and presence in the political landscape that could hardly have been imagined in the early 1980s.[24] Cosatu's chief weapon in this period was the staging of large and impressive national campaigns and stayaways which targeted industrial activity countrywide. It was less successful however in reviving community and civic structures through the vehicle of a relaunched anti-apartheid front, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDM), which united a wide array of anti-apartheid organisations of which Cosatu was the strongest.

In this period Numsa underwent a number of significant shifts which set the stage for the nature of its engagements in the 1990s. The period was marked by a growing closeness between the labour movement and the ANC. This developing relationship, after Mawu and Naawu's initial standoff, was the result of a number of factors which will be explored below. The period also saw a shift in Numsa's internal politics which were characterised by a growing co-operation between the so called `syndicalists` and `Charterists`. Despite strong, and at times hostile debate in a variety of union forums, different tendencies were united in the desire to eliminate apartheid and replace it with some form of democratic state. This permitted the union to pursue strategies in a fairly united manner.

Political shifts within Numsa unfolded against the background of proliferating rumours from 1987 onwards that moves were underway in ANC circles to engage in a negotiated political settlement. Although the contending positions of the revolutionary overthrow of the state versus a negotiated

political settlement had long been debated within the ANC, the negotiated option became ascendant. It was well known that Mandela favoured a negotiated settlement and that the armed struggle, which he had launched, was merely a means of pressurising the state to that goal.[25] These `rumours` were finally confirmed for Cosatu at a meeting in Zimbabwe with the ANC and UDF in July 1989 from which emerged the Harare Declaration which laid out preconditions for political negotiations and a programme of action for achieving these as well as the principles which would form the basis of a new constitution. Mbuyi Ngwenda, a Volkswagen shopsteward and later Numsa General Secretary, recalls the significance of this meeting,

> Alec attended and other Cosatu leaders. We went to see to what extent the ANC policies could advance unions' interest; and to begin to understand the ANC's perception of the trade union movement as a whole; and to draw some linkages; and for us to understand if there was going to be changes how would Sactu be phased into the country because we had Cosatu as a federation; and to exchange ideas on economic policy.
>
> We started from talking about the insurrection. Just forcefully taking power. Later it was the transference of power, and then it was the negotiated political settlement because the material conditions were changing. So this was a very important session where we told the ANC what was happening, these are the trends, this is what business is doing. So that was a turning point for consolidating our struggles inside and outside for a common objective…the realisation that the movement one day would become a legal one... So in the late '80s we see the Harare Declaration.[26]

It is important to situate the union's changing politics against this progression towards a negotiated settlement as it provides a backdrop to political shifts within Numsa and to its changing positions within Cosatu.

After the 1987 Congress various political tendencies emerged in Numsa. Although debates between the proponents of these tendencies were at times acerbic, the `catholicism`[27] in the union allowed for wide range of views to be aired. In this the union was a true heir of a Gramscian strand of Marxism which was conspicuous in its style and content for its non-sectarian approach. Numsa's tolerance of a wide range of views stemmed from a deep belief in internal democracy. In Ngwenda's words "All members must have a say - it is their union."[28] Between the tendencies however agreement existed on the objective of a non-racial democratic state and the black consciousness tradition never being a strong tendency within the union or Cosatu.[29] Agreement also existed that the capitalist system had failed the majority of the population in South Africa and thus socialism was a desirable alternative. Opinions on how to achieve this varied however. Erwin commented on how this was expressed in the union,

> Socialism is an abstract proposition and you could come to it through different routes. You could come to socialism through the abstract route of reading. You can come to it through the passion of being a worker and the understanding that when workers unite they've got power. So in the rhetoric of Numsa you would find all of that. You could find very strident left, dogmatic positions. You find extremely powerful worker expressions of the socialist ideal of collectivism and the appreciation that it needs to be worker power that drives that, and some very sophisticated positions in international dialogue about

> where socialism goes that current leaders like Langa Zita and Enoch Godongwana articulate.[30]

Although members and officials belonged to a wide range of political organisations, three main tendencies emerged in Numsa and particular positions tended to dominate in specific regions. The first grouping consisted of the former Mawu `workerists`, now termed `syndicalists`. This grouping, however began to demonstrate a much greater openness and flexibility in its political stance than had been the case in Mawu. The experience of the split had made them wary of not permitting full and open political debate in the union. It favoured a socialist leaning labour party akin to the PT in Brazil which incorporated a strong trade union presence but was open to the inclusion of other groupings.[31] In this it belonged to the strand of syndicalism that acknowledged the need for some form of national co-ordinating body or as Rocker phrases it `general industrial alliances`[32]. It espoused a gradual progression to socialism which would involve some form of engagement with capital in order to begin a process of reducing capital's leverage of power. It advanced a strong working class orientation together with a consistent and serious regard for organisation. Such organisation, it believed, should empower workers and operate as the prime instrument of struggle. This group Maseremule asserts, "... was highly strategic in shaping what direction the organisation would take and boosted the confidence of workers."[33] The tendency was dominant in Natal particularly Northern Natal, the Western Cape, Northern Transvaal, and Highveld Regions and was supported by powerful officials such as Moses Mayekiso, Mike Mabayakhulu, Peter Dantjies, Frank Boshielo and Joe Foster, as well as by influential white intellectuals such as Alec Erwin, Bernie Fanaroff, and Adrienne Bird.[34]

The second tendency revolved around the Charterist tradition and the Congress Movement. Advocates of this tendency were tacit supporters, or actual underground activists, of the ANC and SACP. Numsa president Daniel Dube commented on how political debate at the time was made richer by unknown members of liberation movements in the union's ranks,

> ... it was evident that some of us who were coming from other trade union organisations were not speaking South African labour movement language. Because they already had links with the SACP and the ANC underground.... they would have an opportunity to come up inside our organisation and try and influence the trend...And one of the reasons why we had this rich divergence of ideas and opinions was based on that fact. It was only after the unbanning of the organisations when it was possible for these comrades now to come out into the open, then we said after all these years, some of us were already linked to The Movement.[35]

In the ANC tradition, this group accommodated a range of ideologies which contained elements of both capitalist and class perspectives. It did not adopt a strong socialist position but would argue for an egalitarian society. Adherents ranged from those who were purely nationalist ANC supporters who held allegiance to the leadership of ANC President Oliver Tambo and imprisoned Nelson Mandela, to those who held a similar position overlaid with an allegiance to the SACP's

Eastern European style of communism. The left of this position would be an active presence in any debate in the union regarding socialism. It located its arguments firmly in a two-stage struggle for socialism and despite its association with Umkhonto we Sizwe it eschewed the violent seizure of state power. It viewed the ANC's military wing as one in a range of weapons which would weaken the apartheid state sufficiently to force it to the negotiating table. A military option belonged to the category of `the propaganda of warfare` which aimed to win the hearts and minds of the masses through the targeting of strategic installations. This tendency predominated in the Eastern Cape Region and its most powerful proponent on the left of the position was Numsa official Enoch Godongwana.

The third tendency was loosely labelled the `Ultra Left` and was referred to by some as `The Trots`.[36] This was the smallest grouping and centred around young socialists who belonged to various left groups subscribing to Trotskyist leaning organisations such as Wosa, (Workers Organisation for Socialist Action), Action Youth, the Unity Movement, and the Young Socialists from Alexandra township. A number of powerful organisers were associated with the groups such as Bethuel Maseremule, Jabu Radebe,[37] Alistair Smith, Sue Harvey, Roger Etkind, Elias Monage, Tony Ruiters, and Osborne Galeni plus some influential organisers in the CWIU. The group espoused a Leninist working class party in a democratic centralist mould. It subscribed to a one stop path to socialism which involved a revolutionary rupture through the seizure of state power and the heights of the economy by means of factory takeovers. In Gramscian manner it favoured a vanguard party that was rooted in the organisation of the working masses. It was concerned to avoid the pitfalls of becoming an isolated, elitist group and believed in promoting a relationship with those aligned with the Congress Movement. This position predominated in Numsa's Wits East and Wits Central Regions although certain local councils in these regions held different positions. In Maseremule's analysis, "The syndicalists would use socialist ideas as a method of analysis but not as a mode of struggle like the Ultra Left."[38]

It would be oversimplistic however to assert that there were no overlaps between positions, especially as the Mawu influence could be seen in all the tendencies. For example, although the ex-Mawu `syndicalists` were to largely distance themselves from the Ultra Left's position it is interesting to note that there were ideological sympathies between these groupings especially with reference to Mawu's expression of socialism before its entry into Numsa. The politics which emerged in the Mayekiso Campaign is a case in point.

In June 1986 Numsa embarked on a prolonged national campaign following the detention of General Secretary Moses Mayekiso and four other leaders of the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) who were charged with sedition, subversion, and treason, the latter carrying the death sentence.[39] Inside the country a forceful campaign of factory stoppages and protests were staged to

secure their release in which by April 1987, 62 000 members had been involved. Such actions however were unsuccessful. After 900 days in jail, which included seven months in solitary confinement, the five leaders were released on a bail of R 10 000.[40] The charges mostly related to their involvement in establishing `organs of people's power` in Alexandra township whilst Mayekiso was additionally charged with mobilising workers and the community against the capitalist system in order that `the working class or its unions and progressive organisations should seize control of the means of production and residential areas.`[41] At this point the union relaunched its `Viva Moss Campaign` both in South Africa and in a new departure, internationally.

Numsa's National Campaigns Co-ordinator, Geoff Schreiner, who was associated with the syndicalist group, led the campaign and focussed on soliciting support from international worker organisations. These included disparate trade unions, and labour bodies such as the IMF, The General Council of Trade Unions of Japan, the UAW (United Automobile Workers) in the USA who formed a Jurists Committee consisting of high profile legal personalities to monitor the trial, The British Trade Union Council (TUC), and the International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) which prepared pamphlets in 100 languages to mobilise support). Solidarity committees were also established in places such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Brazil and Australia where marches, placard demonstrations and sit-ins outside South African embassies were organised.[42] In general Numsa decided not to co-ordinate or direct these international initiatives as they included vastly different organisations representing varying political positions. International support for the campaign grew hugely as workers around the world marched and picketed and the press worldwide covered the trial. Numsa President, Daniel Dube recalls, "This Mayekiso case was publicised in America. And I was present at one stage in Canada, where this was discussed at an international forum. And I even took part in a march in the United States, where the UAW in the States was sensitising the American community about the evils of apartheid."[43] Such international links were not without their complications however, as old ANC/Sactu antagonisms to this independent union activity were ignited. Campaign leaders, such as Schreiner, not unlike the Ultra Left group in Numsa, reasserted the Mawu independent worker vanguardist position and in Britain, consciously approached socialist formations which they believed more readily represented Numsa's political outlook than the ANC/Sactu/SACP alliance. This included `ultra-left` Trotskyist organisations such the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group which formed the Friends of Moses Mayekiso committee. The ANC-supported British Anti-Apartheid Movement attacked the City Group as a fringe Trotskyite formation, and criticised Numsa's campaign for its focus on a lone worker leader, characterising it as a `personality cult`.[44] The union refuted this explaining that the union's aim was not only to promote the cause of Mayekiso, but `to explain broader developments in working class organisation in South Africa.`[45] Countering the ANC's accusation of sectarianism Mayekiso too argued that,

> ... through organisations outside like the IMF, metal workers internationally took the

> battle and fought relentlessly. In Britain the ANC were hostile and saying things like `what about other people in jail' and `they want Mayekiso to be equal to Mandela', forgetting that we were representing people sitting in jail. Lawyers were just waiting for us to win the case and create a precedent so they could take up other people's cases of treason especially in the Eastern Cape. The case was representing people all over South Africa who were creating and working in organs of people's power, working to the eradication of apartheid. It was a naive approach by those individuals in the ANC.[46]

All tendencies in Numsa too were influenced by the Charterist group. In terms of relative power over union direction and policies there was a dual locus within the union. In the political arena the Charterists asserted a growing dominance. Outside of the political sphere its influence was minimal. In similar manner the Ultra Left was more active in the union's political life than in its organisational aspects. Here the syndicalists were undisputedly in control. Basic organisational questions concerning collective bargaining and its relationship to economic policy, as well as administrative policy was formulated by this group. This enabled, in the main, uncontested organisational and bargaining policies and facilitated the everyday running of the union. Membership trusted its ability to deal with the bread and butter issues of union life and its commitment to working people filtered into organisers' practices no matter their political affiliation. As long as organisers laboured with diligence to service their demarcated membership, political persuasion did not obstruct the internal operations of the union. In general, although with exceptions, political division amongst leadership did not profoundly impact on membership as it had in the 1984 Mawu split. Mayekiso remembers, "It was not polarising the workers, they wanted liberation, they didn't want theory. Division came at the theoretical level on how to get to socialism. This was mainly amongst officials."[47] It was thus that organisers who might espouse different political opinions from their members could still gain their respect. "You could never be fired for your political views as in Fawu [Food & Allied Workers Union]" commented Maseremule.[48] The irony was of course that the syndicalists had created an organisational culture which promoted an openness of debate and a high degree of independence and tolerance. It was an environment which advanced basic democratic principle through transparency, mandates and report backs. It provided a context where discussion, reading, learning from history and other international experiences was encouraged. It was this environment that gave the political space for ultra leftists to contest the syndicalists' politics. The result was a healthy political diversity which imbued the union with a rich and complex internal life, which was more in evidence than in any other Cosatu affiliate. Maseremule recalls that, "Enoch Godongwana said our discussions were at a much higher level in Numsa than anything in Cosatu where he attended meetings."[49] This was noteworthy in the context of an external environment of threat and political upheaval where both opposition forces and a number of anti-apartheid political formations had lost control of their constituents who employed coercion and violence to enforce goals. Godongwana, later as a provincial member of parliament, commented that he had not experienced a similar level of tolerance and open debate in any other avenue of political life.[50]

In political terms the syndicalists and Charterists were able to find common ground as they concurred on a two stage progression to socialism as well as on other issues. This should not of course be overstated as alliances of convenience and concurrence were forged between the different tendencies at different times but this sympathy held in the main. The Ultra leftists however remained isolated despite being a powerful force to contend with in the late 1980s. In Erwin's view its position was problematic and not well supported,

> ... the bulk of the leadership was strongly opposed to their positions because we argued these were not power positions. These were more using worker activity to bolster a political point. And our argument was that when you use worker power you must weaken capital not make a political point in some abstruse debate about whether the left should be revolutionary today or tomorrow, because it's an abstract debate...So whilst people were allowed to speak and take different positions there was a very tough clash and conscious attempt to reduce those people's influence in the organisational style of the union. And that became particularly acute when you had to make decisions of retreat. Then the tensions were very high because the far left groupings have an inbuilt tendency to advance early and retreat too late to recover anything.[51]

The Ultra Leftist influence was much reduced at an important staff meeting in Durban in 1989, and in the debate that occurred between the Eastern Cape and Wits delegates at the May 1989 Numsa Congress. The possibility of a negotiated political settlement under the auspices of the ANC was now in evidence. Debate centred around how to reposition Numsa in the new conjuncture. At the staff meeting Godongwana recalls Erwin making a powerful intervention when he commented, "No-one will oppose the ANC. You will be marginalising the labour movement if you do forever."[52] It was thus ironically that a `white Marxist intellectual` echoed commentator O'Meara's remark in 1985,

> The ANC is indubitably the political grouping with the widest possible political base in South Africa and the strongest support amongst Black workers...The political culture of Black workers over at least the last 40 years has been largely moulded by `the Congress tradition`. While this may be disturbing to the purist prescriptions of White Marxist intellectuals, this is the real and inescapable context within which working-class organisation takes place in South Africa.[53]

At the 1989 Congress a decision to separate officials from worker regional delegates was made. This angered the Ultra Left as it perceived it as the syndicalists attempting to reduce its power, but ultimately it had to concede that this was in the interest of worker democracy. It became apparent that in some regions workers depended strongly on union officials to voice their opinions as some worker delegates struggled to motivate resolutions. Mayekiso commented that the Congress demonstrated the need to work much harder at building national leadership.[54] Erwin recalls,

> ... we developed a good working practice which said you could be in any political tendency you want but those tendencies can't manifest themselves in congresses. In a congress you must abide by the mandate of your branch, or region or whatever. And we took practical steps to enforce that. We forced the officials out of the delegations to congress and said you must sit on the sides because you guys don't respect that discipline.

> In the first year you'd see people trying to caucus, for people in the Ultra Left they were very unhappy about this because they felt the dominant leadership myself, and Moss and others were Party [SACP] people and we were dominating the leadership and not allowing them to speak. But truth is, I think, we conducted ourselves very well and without that leadership in Numsa the Ultra Left would have been smashed because they were never strong enough or organisationally capable enough to make an in-road...[55]

During the Congress the majority of delegates came to an acceptance that an armed revolutionary seizure of power was unlikely to eventuate. As Mayekiso expressed it, "...I believe the solutions to our country's problems will finally come through negotiations. I don't believe that we will be able to get to Pretoria and oust [President PW] Botha from those buildings."[56] Delegates acceded to the fact that an armed assumption of power could not ensue without winning over the army and large parts of the police whose loyalties lay with the Nationalist government. The majority of delegates also conceded that in order to grasp the opportunity of wielding power in any future dispensation, the labour movement would have to acquiesce to a negotiated settlement under the auspices of the ANC. This concession changed the balance of forces within the union. Effectively the Congress adopted the two stage position on the passage to socialism. A policy document presented at the Congress stated that 'the removal of the apartheid state will be a step towards the liberation of our people' and 'the working class must play a role in the national-democratic struggle.'[57] Thereafter much of leadership began to express the view that no quick route to socialism existed. As Mayekiso argued, "Getting rid of apartheid, that`s another gain towards socialism ...Getting rid of apartheid is part and parcel of stages...There is no one stage, there is no two stages, there are *stages* towards socialism."[58]

In the 1980s everything felt possible as workers rolled back the frontiers of management and state control. In the 1990s the socialist project revealed itself as more complex. Erwin commented on how a socialist solution would not be achieved through a `massive uprising` as "tomorrow you've still got to govern. And you govern in the same conditions that were there yesterday so unless you can manage those conditions you're finished."[59] Alistair Smith expressed reservations about the level of workers' power and their ability to seize control and to govern,

> We don't think workers taking control is some kind of magical process, or that socialism can come overnight. There is a serious problem as far as skills and education are concerned...[60]

> We were now fighting rear guard battles at the shop floor... hit with retrenchment notices all over the fucking place… and we were just not capable of turning this into a national campaign. And this, I think, is where the debate should have been…between the Social Democrats and the Lefties in the union. It was about turning the fight to save jobs into a national campaign. And if you were able to …translate this into concrete activity in the Industrial Council. We failed to do that...[61]

There was a recognition that progress towards socialism would depend on workers' power. In Mtutuzeli Tom's words,

> It will depend on the strength of workers generally, and on the programme of the working class... We need not fear any future government. We need to look at that government as a weapon we're going to use in really implementing change in this country. We as the metal workers must be supportive of that government as well as critical. If that government is taking decisions that are detrimental to our vision as the working class we need to fight against it.[62]

The debate then progressed to how political negotiations should proceed. A delegate expressed it thus, "We have no principled objection to negotiating a political settlement to end the South African conflict but there must be certain minimum conditions before negotiations can happen."[63] Delegates articulated the need for the working class to assume control over the process of negotiations and outlined their conditions for the opening of negotiations as being the unbanning of banned organisations, the release of detained or imprisoned leaders, the return of exiles, the confinement of the SAP and SADF to barracks, the lifting of the State of Emergency, and the repeal of all security legislation. These conditions would later form the basis of the July 1989 Harare Declaration. If these conditions were not met by the Nationalist government the Congress resolved actively to oppose negotiations.[64] In order to flex working class power at the negotiating table the Congress resolved to strengthen the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).[65] In the words of one delegate, "We won't stop the struggle. We'll have to go on conscientising and mobilising and make sure people know what is happening in negotiations and how we must react. We must revive our structures so when we go to negotiations we go from a position of strength.[66] At that point the MDM organisations were in disarray, and no other structures commanding mass support had emerged. Thus the union argued that organised workers had a duty to rebuild working class organisations to enable the working class to assume a leading role. In the national struggle it proposed that Cosatu employ full-time project organisers to assist in this process. It also argued however that while Cosatu should be the driving force, the structures of the MDM `should be open to any oppressed and exploited resident`[67] regardless of their political persuasion. It resolved that `every street shall have a democratically elected street committee; every area, an area committee; every town a local general council; every region a regional committee of elected representatives from all towns. The national democratic movement shall be built from elected representatives of the regional committees.`[68] At a local and regional level working class formations could, from time to time, form tactical alliances with anti-apartheid organisations and where necessary with black taxi-owners and traders associations. It firmly rejected however "any alliance, whether tactical or strategic, with representatives of big capital, homeland opposition parties and participants in tri-cameral and other local government structures, until they have shown in action that they support the principles, policy and strategy of the mass democratic movement."[69]

Political developments in Numsa's national Congress were mirrored by its shifting politics in Cosatu National Congresses. In the late eighties, as Wits organiser Tony Kgobe commented, "The entire Numsa was viewed by other affiliates as ultra left so it was difficult for us to hold positions

in Cosatu. But it built good organisation so it was hard to ignore."[70] In reality as Erwin observed, "Behind a banner it looked like homogeneous positions in practice it was a heaving debate with different tendencies."[71] In fact, however `ultra left` the union appeared to other affiliates, the Ultra Left in Numsa was losing ground. Nevertheless Numsa's persistent return to its socialist politics as a point of reference was sufficient to position it on the far left of Cosatu politics.

At Cosatu's 1988 Special Congress the alliance debate continued. A joint Numsa /CWIU resolution called for a tight, broad anti-apartheid front.[72] Numsa had made the shift towards the forging of alliances with a much broader front of organisations working for the end of apartheid. It conceded that alliances could proceed with organisations which did not subscribe to a socialist position, but should however represent the working class and other oppressed people. Thus Numsa included Nactu, the rival union federation, whose organising roots lay within working-class organisation whilst it excluded Uwusa on the grounds that it had been constituted by a political/cultural formation, Inkatha, and not by workers. NUM in an opposing motion called for a united front of organisations opposed to apartheid in the non-racial ANC tradition. This, it argued, should be a multi-class alliance which could include middle-class white organisations such as the Black Sash and the Five Freedoms Forum. It feared that the Numsa/CWIU resolution would result in a lack of co-ordinated mobilisation which characterised the Nactu, Azapo tradition. Mass mobilisation was historically largely the initiative of Cosatu, UDF and their allies. The debate was heated but tempered by the impact of escalating attacks on Cosatu by the state and employers from 1987 onwards. The need to cement unity in the face of such an onslaught promoted a more conciliatory and less divisive interaction. In consequence the NUM conceded it was willing to work with organisations outside the Congress tradition and Numsa in turn acknowledged that many of its proposed allies, such as Azapo and the UDF, were multi-class organisations. A joint resolution emerged which proposed the formation of a committee to address the development of 'a programme of action and organisation against repression' which should culminate in a broad anti-apartheid conference.[73] In the event, the Anti-Apartheid Conference did not materialise. In the planning stage much argument and difference emerged which was in part due to Numsa's objections to certain organisations being included. Furthermore the New Unity Movement, and the black consciousness organisations, including Nactu, withdrew shortly before the Conference. Finally, as delegates made their way to the Conference in Cape Town, it was banned by the state.[74]

At Cosatu's third congress, in July 1989, a new spirit of unity was in evidence. Numsa's 377 delegates had nominated a panel of worker speakers to motivate and argue the union's views at the Congress. This was in marked contrast to many other affiliates where officials dominated.[75] In an unprecedented development NUM and Numsa were able to negotiate their positions and this freed other affiliates from having to identify with one political bloc or the other. Mayekiso commented on more "political openness" and "more respect for democracy...Before, if one believed the

position was wrong he just fought and fought...NUM and Numsa were at loggerheads. NUM would go there thinking we would get Numsa. Numsa would go there thinking we would get NUM."[76] It was less predictable as to how an affiliate would align itself. For the first time no resolutions went to the vote. Numsa motivated its resolution on the process of political settlement which echoed its decision at its 1989 Congress.

The NUM proposed a further attempt at organising a broad based Anti-Apartheid Conference (AAC). Numsa raised objections to the resolution on two points. Firstly, the union called for the organising committee to consist of 'Cosatu/Nactu and their allies' and not, as NUM proposed, 'Cosatu and UDF'[77] Secondly, Numsa agreed to invite all anti-apartheid organisations, but only if 'their class interests are not diametrically opposed to those of our members....We do not have a problem with the middle class, with the petty bourgeoisie, with the church people, with the sports people, with the small businesses, with the professionals. We are opposed to representatives of the bosses' organisations attending the AAC."[78] Its objections focussed on people such as Anglo American's Gavin Relly and Zach de Beer, and white liberal political parties representing capital's interests, in particular the Democratic Party. Numsa's John Gomomo queried how Cosatu could invite as an ally Zach de Beer, a director of Anglo American, whose company exploited and engaged in mass dismissals, especially of mineworkers.[79] His party, the Democratic Party, he reminded the Congress was the voice of big business. The Congress debated these points but believed that Nactu had disappointed Cosatu before and thus the NUM resolution should be carried unamended. The NUM general secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, argued that tactical alliances were appropriate at specific conjunctures, even if this entailed building a relationship with big business and cited the Natal peace initiatives as an example. Numsa withdrew its objections and the Congress broke into applause.[80] Although not fully appreciated at this point, it was a decisive blow to Numsa's socialist project. The NUM position would now dominate in Cosatu political circles, although the pragmatic organisational politics of Numsa's syndicalists would continue to exert its influence in the economic sphere around the nature of a future economic dispensation.

Numsa secured some victories in other arenas however. At the 1987 Cosatu Congress, Numsa had promoted the idea of a Workers Charter. Delegates had voted against this, seeing a Workers Charter as a means of replacing the Freedom Charter. Now, NUM, TGWU and Actwusa successfully motivated for devising a Workers Charter after consultation and debate with membership. Such a Charter should inform the content of workers' rights to be inserted into a new constitution, a Bill of Rights and other enabling legislation. In short Cosatu was attempting to advance workers' interests through the use of the law and the regulation of basic organising rights. This was to develop into the Workers Charter Campaign and would culminate in the adoption of *The Cosatu Platform of Worker Rights* at a Cosatu Special Congress in September 1993. It was moved by Sactwu, a union which actively organised around the campaign, and was seconded by

Numsa. This Platform embraced the inclusion in the Bill of Rights of the right of workers to join trade unions, to bargain collectively on social and economic issues, to gain access to information from employers and the government, and most controversially the right to strike on social, economic and political issues and the ancillary right to picket. The Platform also aimed to include in the new constitution a clause ensuring a central role for trade unions and civil society in public policy making at a national and industry level.[81] Further legislation supporting workers rights would include the provision of a range of organisational arrangements such as access by trade union representatives to company premises, automatic check–off facilities, and the recognition of shopstewards for bargaining and representation purposes.[82]

The securing of basic worker rights was an important task for trade unionist confronting a transition to a new democratic government. As Sactwu (South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union) General Secretary Ebrahim Patel warned, "There is no certainty that South African unions will emerge stronger and more powerful in a democratic society…"[83] Yet as important as it was to secure these legal rights, politically working class hegemony was being consigned to a few clauses in the constitution. Was Numsa's capitulation at the Cosatu 1989 Congress the end of its commitment to building socialist power? Certainly, the leadership's incorporation into the NUM's national democratic aspirations was more about acquiescence than compromise. Indeed it can be doubted that compromise was possible between a socialist and nationalist, populist viewpoint. However, it would be incorrect to view Numsa's shift as a shallow, opportunist moment in its history although some held there were elements of this. Maseremule, for example, believed that Erwin's politics fell firmly into a social democratic range and that in reality he had abandoned any notion of a two stage progression to socialism although he did not wish to acknowledge this. Maseremule viewed the syndicalists' borrowing of collective bargaining concepts, as reflected in the three year bargaining programme, from the heart of social democratic Australia, as evidence of this.[84] While this may have been true of some individuals there were other factors at play. Not least amongst these was the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. This event profoundly shifted the frame of reference for socialists and communists worldwide and South African socialists were no exception. The `syndicalists` in Numsa responded by focusing the debate on how to avoid the creation of an authoritarian communist state and on how to create a `democratic socialism` where a true worker democracy reigned. Yet this grouping continued to delay the development of a working class programme. Numsa, as recorded earlier, adopted the Freedom Charter as a set of `minimum political demands` subject to the further development of a `working class programme`. By 1989, however, despite a number of resolutions to the effect, no detailed working class programme had been developed.[85] There appeared to be a lack of political will on the leadership's part to develop such a programme and this weakened Numsa's ability to popularise a socialist struggle. The `syndicalist` group's focus on `democratic socialism` was in many ways a restatement of its earlier rejection in Mawu of the SACP's

`orthodox` communism. This renewed emphasis would lead to the development of a number of strategies, particularly in the economic sphere, which will be explored in Chapter 14.

The politics of campaigns

Introduction

The Numsa leaderships' political shift towards a negotiated democratic resolution to the end of apartheid was not however necessarily reflected on the ground where a radicalisation had been occurring. This radicalisation of large numbers of ordinary workers began to develop at the point that Cosatu moved to the political centre stage in 1986. Fantasia has described the progress for ordinary workers from resistance to authority in the workplace, to a broader resistance to other injustices elsewhere in the society thus, "As fighting trade unionists workers can be forced to see beyond themselves, and hierarchies and authority structures that are evident in the workplace can be revealed in the wider community, breaking down the sharp divide between work and community."[86] The participation in broad industry-wide strikes, in union and Cosatu national campaigns, and in national stayaways which involved all oppressed communities was to have a profound effect on workers. Regional and local stayaways continued but over time nationwide action incorporated these actions. Joey Maake, an organiser and later Numsa's legal officer, remembers how campaigns unified factories in Numsa's Vaal region, "The problem for a region like this is how you unify this region. There are separate plant negotiations all the time. It seems that you have to find issues apart from bargaining to bring it together. The LRA campaign was a hundred per cent supported in this area. The level of militancy was high."[87] NikitaVazi, a Western Cape organiser, commented on how campaigns united different sectors of the union, "A national union and its identity is very important. Numsa has so many sectors...At a national level there is a need to have campaigns that are going to create unity and identity."[88] Volkswagen shopsteward Mbuyi Ngwenda also testified to the impact of the Mayekiso Campaign in building workers' unity and confidence, "... the case against him [Mayekiso] mobilised workers across the country so it was good in terms of building confidence and militance in workers."[89] The Alex 5's release in 1989 affirmed workers in their assertion of power and confirmed them in the notion that theirs was a rightful struggle against a system that most of the world abhorred. Although Cosatu consulted with its MDM partners it was the dominant force in the opposition movement and in the conducting of campaigns and the calling of stayaways. Workers drew confidence and strength from this knowledge. Their assertion and flexing of power was only partially checked by state security forces and in Natal by the emergence of Inkatha related violence.

Cosatu launched a wide range of powerful campaigns in the late 1980s which embraced the bargaining, organisational, economic, and political spheres of union life. These campaigns were implemented through a variety of tactics which included factory stoppages, placard

demonstrations, illegal marches, media and education inputs and discussions, cultural activities, and most importantly the national stayaway which was to emerge as one of the most effective forms of political pressure. Campaigns unfolded in the context of more widespread industrial unrest , chiefly around the Living Wage, rendering the economy highly unstable. Before the launch of Cosatu, the stayaway tactic had been chiefly employed in a localised manner. Cosatu's launch, and workers ready identification with its aims, placed it at the fulcrum of national political mobilisation.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the role of Numsa and its members in each of the many local and national stayaways in this period. A brief overview of the major stayaways will thus have to suffice. Particular emphasis will be placed however on Cosatu's most significant campaign in the period namely the action against the Labour Relations Amendment Bill. This campaign is explored firstly as an illustration of the tenacity and impressive variety of tactics employed by the union to educate, mobilise, and sustain members in actions over extended periods of time – in this case for over four years. Secondly the campaign illustrates well the contested politics in Numsa between a more radical membership and the union's officials but it also demonstrates the limits to this radicalism. Finally the campaign is explored for the significant window of opportunity that its resolution revealed for the `syndicalists` in the union.

It is difficult to assess actual numbers of Numsa members involved in stayaway action but it is reasonable to surmise that metal worker participation was high. Such factors as Numsa's sophisticated campaign structures, the sheer number of workers it had organised, the fact that two of its sectors, the auto and engineering industries, were primarily located on the East Rand and Eastern Cape where stayaway figures were particularly high, and that metal workers had historically been at the forefront of organisation and strike action would support this assumption.

Campaigns: route to a new politics

The earliest Cosatu campaign in 1986 revolved around the recognition of May Day which constituted part of its Living Wage Demands[90] and which resonated powerfully with working people, as the Numsa Living Wage Campaign described in Chapter 5 demonstrated. Cosatu called for a national stayaway on May 1 to reinforce its bargaining demands which were in this case directed at both employers and the state. Worker absences were recorded as 79 per cent countrywide and involved more than 1.5 million workers.[91] The June 16 national stayaway demand later in the year, fell similarly into Cosatu's living wage package. The independent Labour Monitoring Group recorded an absence of 84 per cent of coloured workers and 98 per cent of African workers at firms organised by Cosatu.[92] In 1986, 77.8 per cent of workdays lost were due to Cosatu initiated stayaways[93] and politically related industrial action accounted for 3.5 million workdays lost.[94] In May 1987, thousands of workers stayed away in Cosatu's continuing May Day

campaign despite the state's ban on outdoor May Day meetings.[95] In 1988, Sharpeville Day on March 31, and June 16 were accompanied by national stayaways. By 1988 workers in many industrial sectors had won these symbolic days as paid public holidays in bargaining rounds and they had become de facto public holidays despite the state's stubborn refusal to recognise them in law. The campaign was to demonstrate how labour activity was constantly eroding the authority of the state. In many of these stayaways the theme of denied citizenship was present. Fosatu and the UDF's `Don't Vote` campaigns against the tricameral parliament had initiated this trend in 1984. On 5/6 May 1987 1.5 million workers observed a two day national stay-away call to protest the all-white elections, and in September 1989 a stayaway protested an all-white referendum.[96]

The outcome of the Mayekiso campaign was more debatable. The union itself admitted in 1988 that despite the resources it had committed to the campaign that, "It is difficult to measure exactly what the impact of the local and international campaign has been."[97] The Alex 5 were indeed acquitted in 1989 after a trial lasting two years and it was to be the apartheid regime's last treason trial.[98] As previously mentioned it had forged unity and confidence amongst workers and Mayekiso believed that "…the union played a major role in bringing my plight to the public eye... I think that is maybe why we won the case, because everyone took it very seriously, and the whole world was focussed on that because of the union's work."[99] Yet this was only partly true and the removal of the Alex 5 from Alexandra township at a critical point had resulted in important losses. By 1989 the political climate had profoundly altered and the possibility of political negotiations had become a reality. It was in this context that the acquittal took place. On his release Mayekiso commented, "Such a long time in jail for nothing."[100] But from the state's point of view it had achieved an important objective. It is most likely that the state's aim was dual. It was unable to outlaw unions which were rooted in the factories so it aimed to weaken their leadership at the same time as weakening the link between community organisation and the socialist sympathising Numsa. It had little direct evidence of illegal activity so it aimed to taint the `Alex's 5s` actions through association with illegal organisations. Abel believes that the state showed an ignorance of the nuances of black politics in its choice of Mayekiso as a means of delegitimating the labour movement through contamination with township unrest and the banned ANC's call for ungovernability, as he was a well-known `workerist` who refused to affiliate the AAC to the UDF.[101] It is true that the state may not have appreciated the niceties of black politics but it could appreciate the organising experience of a militant trade unionist and understand this threat to state power. Ironically the defence while attempting to prove the AAC was operating in a legal manner by stressing its respect for the observation of legal procedures such as typed minutes, consultation and report-backs to membership, and a registered constitution,[102] also demonstrated that an experienced union leader had the know-how to build alternative organs of state power which could draw in neglected sectors of the population which the `immediatist` youth had alienated. By removing Mayekiso from community life for nearly four years the state had obstructed the building

of mature organisation at a critical time when the opportunity existed, and it had also prevented the infusion of a socialist perspective across the community. As Ruiters has pointed out, Mayekiso was one of the few leaders to initiate the successful implementation of the ANC's call for the building of alternative organs of people's power which its ally, the UDF, had been unsuccessful in implementing.[103] Ultimately, although the state lost the case, it had assisted in shoring up a continuing capitalist ideology. Although Mayekiso on his release publicly reasserted the union's right to engage in community struggles and the importance of its socialist politics,[104]it was at this point that the union on a national level was capitulating to NUM pressures to forego its insistence on working class alliances and leadership of a future dispensation.

In September 1987 the state introduced the Labour Relations Amendment Bill. In that year alone, 9 million workdays were lost in strikes and stayaways.[105] The cost to production was becoming too high for employers to accept. Thus they prevailed upon the state to curtail the labour movement.[106] In response the state attacked the labour movement on different fronts. The bombing and sabotage of Cosatu House and other union offices, and the outlawing of political participation by Cosatu in March 1988 was part of its strategy but there were limitations to this offensive confronted as it was by union strength in the factories. The government consequently embarked on the more insidious and less conspicuous legal route of amending current labour laws. The Bill was primarily directed at curtailing the right to strike although other limitations were also placed upon unions. It outlawed sympathy strikes and product boycotts and enabled companies to sue union officials, office bearers, or shop stewards for illegal strikes, and to claim financial losses. As most strikes were illegal unions would be financially crippled and strike action without shopsteward leadership was impossible.[107] The Bill attempted to emasculate the militant labour movement by returning to pre-Wiehahn legislation.

Cosatu launched a campaign which required managements to sign a letter to the Minister of Manpower protesting the Bill. It soon became evident however that most employers supported it. In Numsa it was the engineering sector that initially appreciated the LRA threat most clearly. Smith recalls that engineering decided to prioritise the LRA Campaign and to allow it to take precedence over the Living Wage Campaign in 1989. The auto sector, he believed, missed the opportunity to challenge the LRA by fudging the issue, "Workers in the auto-assembly sector saw things differently. In the strike which occurred in virtually all the factories last year [1989], auto combined the two issues. The strike ended with the employers making concessions, but not on changing the LRA. This was what the engineering sector had tried to avoid."[108] As it transpired the engineering sector was no more successful than auto in lobbying employers, but the focus ensured that engineering workers became the backbone of the campaign. In order to ensure maximum union unity on the issue, the SA IMF brought its metal affiliates together in 1988 to strategise an approach to Seifsa. A strategy emerged which presented the demand that Seifsa

support the right to strike, and oppose government interference in collective bargaining. The IMF caucus also proposed that a standard in-house agreement outlining acceptable strike procedures be adopted across the metal industry. It further proposed the compulsory arbitration of disputes over retrenchment, dismissals, recognition and collective bargaining practices.[109] It was thus that alternatives to the proposed Bill became a central focus of Numsa's 1989 Nicisemi negotiations. Seifsa was reluctant to enter negotiations however as the following statement in *Seifsa News* made clear, "Seifsa welcomes many of the proposed changes to the Labour Relations Act and has submitted representation to Parliament on various aspects of the Labour Relations Amendment Bill."[110] Metal wage talks deadlocked and the IMF unions declared a dispute. Shopstewards' determination to block the Bill was evident at a report-back rally in Johannesburg where workers successively emphasised the importance of opposing the Bill.[111]

Meanwhile Cosatu had unsuccessfully attempted to engage major employer bodies under the banner of Saccola, the South African Consultative Committee on Labour Affairs, on the LRA. Numsa recognised the need to escalate opposition and called for the building of a broad campaign where it hoped to draw in Nactu unions on the IMF. A Numsa organiser explained, "We believe there is a very serious need to co-ordinate the campaigns of the various unions - and more broadly. Until then the campaign will be patchy and not very significant."[112] Numsa pursued the campaign with renewed energy and called upon workers to embark on a programme of weekly factory demonstrations. It distributed 150 000 pamphlets calling membership to action and educating them on the Bill. This culminated in the 1988 stayaway. Ruiters, I believe, in assessing the impact of the Campaign overly emphasises the 1988 stayaway in the campaign and dismisses the pre stayaway campaign activity and the cumulative impact of the variety of educative, information, and mobilising tactics used in the totality of the LRA campaign. For example, he asserts that lunchtime demonstrations were unsuccessful because they were observed in an uneven manner and workers would have preferred to demonstrate within working hours.[113] Nevertheless in certain industrial areas lunchtime demonstrations were enthusiastically observed and contributed to raising workers' awareness of the campaign in an area. Part of the reason the 1988 stayaway *was* successful was because of the prolonged build up to the action. By March 1988, following the banning of 17 organisations including the UDF and political restrictions on Cosatu, demonstrations were widespread, many of them jointly executed across factories in an industrial area. Workers streamed into the streets, singing and carrying hand-made placards, and banners with anti-LRA and political slogans. Along the route other workers joined in the protest. Vusi Ntshangase, a Siemens shopsteward and Vice-chair of the Kempton Park Local, recalls the campaign in his company,

> We at Siemens took the LRA campaign to the streets. We discussed the matter in a general meeting in the canteen, and agreed that we are not going to demonstrate in the company premises. The following day we met in the canteen and go out for demonstration, we know our route of demonstration. Then we started singing, from the company to the security gate, our slogan. We march from Election Avenue to the robots,

we turn to Wrench road.

> Just next to Beecham company we see police with dogs, guns, and sjamboks coming behind, another in front of us. We were stopped. They took our placards. We were escorted to the company, but before we come close to the gate, about 500 metres, they start beating us with knobkieries. Many of our comrades were injured. Management through their windows looking on us laughing...there was this suspicion of our management have inform the police. Bad things was of new members, especially the so-called coloured ladies, who decided to resign from the union as this was their first experience.[114]

Ruiters does however point to two significant extra-union worker-initiated mobilising and educative structures that emerged on the East Rand. These structures assisted in mobilising large numbers of workers in Cosatu-led campaigns and stayaways, including in the LRA campaign. Metal workers were significant participants in these formations. The first structure, known as the Industrial Area Committee (IAC) emerged in part as a response to the repression arising out of the State of Emergency, and later, from February 1988, as a strategy to counter the state's prohibition on Cosatu's participation in politics. IACs were modelled on street and block committees which underpinned the concept of `people's power` and were informal local centres where the planning of joint political action took place. Workers from a variety of unions and federations met to plan and co-ordinate political activity and would from time to time forge alliances with youth and civic activists, especially around stayaways. The official Cosatu and Numsa Shopstewards Councils had experienced a decline in energy. As Erwin observed, "In the early eighties during the strike waves these Councils were very effective strike action committees but later you could see that they couldn't maintain that vitality."[115] The IACs, although not replacing these structures, allowed for the broadening and revitalisation of worker participation by virtue of their informal nature which constitutional shopstewards councils had lost once they became institutionalised structures in Fosatu and Cosatu. IAC activities embraced the building of unity across working class formations, especially with Nactu, assisted in organising unorganised workers, worked on the rebuilding of flagging Cosatu locals, educated membership politically and organisationally, strengthened participation in campaigns, allowed for a flow of information, and assisted in the defence of working class organisations under attack. No minutes were taken, or report backs rendered to Cosatu structures thus permitting a high level of trust and fluidity. At least 15 existed across the Witwatersrand and were most active in late 1987 and 1988. Elias Monage, an engineering organiser, recalls how Numsa's call to broaden the LRA campaign was implemented at a local level through discussions in industrial area committees which included all workers regardless of affiliation.[116] The second informal worker structure that emerged on the East Rand at the time was the train committee. Train journeys had long been an important organising resource as was apparent in the recruitment drives and strike action of the early 1980s. In 1987 this natural gathering of workers assumed a more organised form. In the IACs and Cosatu Shopstewards Councils, train committees of commuting shopstewards were formed to plan train meetings

(*emzabalazwemi*). Compartment delegates were appointed, verbal reports given and political slogans and songs sung).[117] As Ruiters observes, "Politics on trains indicated a deep and lively working class political culture."[118]

In May 1988, Cosatu called a Special Congress to decide on a response to ongoing bannings and restrictions, and to develop a programme around the Bill. Numsa resolutions promoted an alliance with Nactu and the possibility of negotiating an alternative industrial relations framework in as many companies as possible. This quiet negotiated approach was however not consonant with worker delegates' feelings of anger and defiance. A number of unions argued for a stayaway. Fawu and Sarhwu argued for a week long stay-away, other unions for two days. Numsa counter argued that the MDM did not possess the strength to sustain a prolonged action. As a Numsa delegate contended, "The state is still fundamentally strong, organisations should not automatically call stay-always but should develop fighting tactics on the shop-floor."[119] This cautious approach reflected union officials' fear of mass dismissals in the recessionary climate. In Numsa's more powerful regions however workers were demanding more radical action. At the Numsa Wits Special Regional Congress in 1988 it was noted that, "The LRAA (Labour Relations Amendment Act) Bill is meant to smash the power of Cosatu and the organised workers it represents. Stopping the Bill is a life and death issue for all worker organisations.[120] It called for the immediate organisation of `a national ballot to decide on action.'[121] Ultimately at Cosatu's Special Congress 1500 Cosatu delegates agreed to escalate factory protests, and to stage three days of action on 6, 7 and 8 June. Delegates avoided the term `stayaway` because of its political connotations but departed from the Congress to spread the word. In the following weeks an upsurge of activity countrywide around the Bill erupted. Immediately after the Congress, for example, 9 000 workers in one local held lunchtime protest action in at least 33 factories.[122] The police began systematically to raid Cosatu local meetings and offices but Cosatu distanced itself from the call. The state's actions however had the paradoxical effect of giving the stayaway call Cosatu's authoritative stamp, while simultaneously placing the onus for organising the stayaway directly onto workers and communities. This devolution of power and responsibility had a dynamic effect on ordinary workers and community residents and mobilisation was impressive. In the event an astonishing three million people stayed away from work for all three days, despite Cosatu only representing one million workers. In South African history there had never been a successful national stayaway of more than one day. Support for the stayaway was strong countrywide, especially in Natal and on the Witwatersrand where 84 per cent of metal and motor workers stayed at home.[123] Seifsa noted that 90 per cent of its operations in the PWV were seriously affected. Some larger companies based in Germiston such as Fry's Metals and Haggie Rand had absentee figures of 95 and 100 per cent respectively.[124] Only in the Western Cape where predominantly coloured workers resided, was the stayaway weak. This reflected Nikita Vazi's comment that, "Campaigns in Western Cape were different, much more union related campaigns. It was rare that

you discussed something between the ANC, government and UDF... In Western Cape only discuss union things ... Natal workers put political flavour in their debate. Natal was much more political than Western Cape." [125] Levels of discipline were high. The 1984 Transvaal 2 day stayaway, for example, saw seven Katlehong residents killed whilst the 1988 three day stayaway saw little violence and residents avoided confrontations with organs of state repression.[126] A Highveld Steel shopsteward commented, "When the UDF was leading, stayaways were just called, they would just issue pamphlet to say that tomorrow is a stayaway and the workers would comply. When Cosatu was leading there would be no stayaway unless it had been thoroughly discussed in the affiliates of Cosatu and then brought back to companies. You had more workers' involvement when Cosatu was leading."[127] Migrant workers were however targeted for attacks by the youth for not supporting the stayaway.[128]

Ruiters perceives the Cosatu-led stayaways in the period between 1986-1989 as being an integral part of `a climate of uprising and insurrection. It became the new vehicle for a much deeper political mobilisation.` He suggests that `the level of class struggle... embodied a revolutionary character` and that, "The informal organisations that grew out of formal union structures represented an attempt to relate to a potentially insurrectionary orientation. For instance, the tensions between the grassroots rank and file organisation and the top leaders of Cosatu are significant."[129] The insurrectionary character he refers to appears to be that of a socialist nature as he cites a number of examples in Numsa shopsteward forums of anti-capitalist sentiments and assertions that a democratic society necessitated the leadership of the working class. He also cites resolutions at both regional and national Numsa congresses calling for the building of a mass united front of working class organisations and the urgency of formulating a working class political programme.[130] Despite significant levels of mobilisation I would contend that he overstates the revolutionary potential in this period. Tensions did indeed exist between the leadership and base but this appeared to have been mediated in debate and officials did not ultimately obstruct, for example, Cosatu's decision to embark on three days of action despite their more cautious approach. The question of who is more radical in a union hierarchy is a complex one. As Mayekiso noted in relation to the 1984 stayaway there can often be a gap between the positions of officials and membership because of their different responsibilities, "It is natural in an organiser to be more cautious, you can't send workers to the guillotine. They've got to win what they are fighting for and advancing their struggles."[131] This however can be a creative tension. Schreiner notes that organisers' experiences can affect their militancy and make them more tentative, "The Sarmcol strike (see below) - it was devastating. Stewards take organisers very seriously so if we had said don't strike they would have taken it very seriously but we said we think you can hold this so we backed and endorsed them. So it is obviously partly your responsibility when you see the pain and suffering it caused. It's affected my life. It's made me more cautious."[132] It is also possible, as Crouch contends, that at times officials can take a more

radical stance than their membership whose views may be more localised and narrow.[133] In this case it appears however that debate pushed cautious officials to support the more radical action advanced by workers thus demonstrating that workers control was still alive in the Federation. Workers gave vent to their `revolutionary potential` but little revolutionary content to their demands or actions was in evidence.

Ruiters similarly imbues the `siyalalas` that developed in the 1985/6 period with a revolutionary potential whereas factory occupations, I believe, were mainly a response to the recruitment of replacement labour. Russian and Italian workers were the first to institute factory occupations and in Italy during 1919-1920 armed workers attempted to run workplaces. Little evidence exists however that South African workers employed the factory occupation tactic in a similar manner. It appears to have evolved primarily as a defensive tactic in response to high unemployment levels and the lack of picketing rights. Occupations took the form of `siyalalas` (IsiZulu for 'We sleep here') whereby strikers occupied the workplace to avoid being locked out, and/or to prevent the entry of scab labour. Employers were initially taken by surprise and were reluctant to call in the police to remove workers in case of damage to costly machinery, computers and filing systems. It was at Haggie Rand in 1986 that the 'siyalala' was used to its maximum effect but it was widely employed by Mawu and other unions to coerce employers chiefly into plant bargaining. In some areas the 'siyalala' was also used as a tactical response to a partial State of Emergency that the state had imposed in 1985 in response to political mobilisation in East Rand townships. Night curfews and the presence of the SADF rendered it difficult for workers to hold meetings outside the factory. As Ruiters argues, "... they [sleep-ins] represented workers' adaptation to new conditions of harsh state repression outside the factory; workers saw factories as more powerful bases from which to fight."[134]

Workers from Fosatu's Sweet Food & Allied Workers Union were the first to employ the siyalala in 1984 in a Durban bread factory strike. Mawu workers at Robert Bosch, a Brits German multinational, followed. In 1985, 300 workers embarked on a legal strike, were fired and in protest occupied the factory. By 5.20 pm management according to *Fosatu Worker News* was "so eager to settle the matter there and then that it continued negotiations right the way through to 3 am…"[135] The company settled on full reinstatement, a 12c an hour increase subject to a further across the board increase later in the year, finalisation of recognition and a commitment to adhere to disciplinary and grievance procedures. Later in the year at Asea, a Swedish cable and house wire company, 900 workers staged a siyalala during a legal strike at the Rosslyn and Pretoria plants to demand the right to plant bargaining. A previous go-slow and overtime ban had failed. After three days, the company obtained a court order compelling workers to leave the plant after working hours but workers returned each day to reoccupy the factory. The company was obliged to tolerate the daily occupation as mass dismissal in a legal strike would likely lead to a reinstatement order.

After seven weeks Asea opened negotiations and addressed the issue of plant bargaining.[136]

In February 1986, over 2 000 Haggie workers struck to demand plant bargaining and a minimum wage of R 3,50 (the extant minimum was R2,07 an hour). One worker described how he took home R80 a week, and his rent in the township was R50 a month. Workers at two Haggie plants struck in Germiston and Johannesburg and it was at the Germiston plant that 540 workers occupied the factory for an unprecedented three weeks. Workers explained, "…if we go out, they will lock us out and easily dismiss us and then re-employ selectively... We are guarding our machines so that no one else can work them."[137] Shopstewards orchestrated support from workers' families and involved them in the provision of blankets and food supplies. On the second day of the siyalala, fifty women established a formal support structure and strikers' wives formed a women's strike support committee in the township. The union solicited support from factories across Germiston, Wadeville, and Alrode and the support group visited factories, churches, and conducted door to door fundraising initiatives. By the fourth day, R150 a day was arriving at the union offices. Women crowded around the factory gates, ululating, and passing bowls of food over the fence as the men inside put on a show for supporters and danced in the factory yard carrying cardboard shields, and knob-kieries. Shopstewards arranged cultural activities, report-backs and briefings, and engaged workers in political discussion. After two weeks employers dismissed all workers but strikers refused to leave so it waited for workers' resistance to wane. Finally it was forced to agree to plant bargaining on wages. [138]

After Haggie, factory occupations spread countrywide. At Dorbyl in Germiston strikers demanded that shopstewards tear up a written warning for not meeting production targets. This was followed by a decision to conduct a sleep-in strike. The next day the company withdrew the warnings.[139] When Barlow Manufacturing in Kew dismissed the Mawu chair of the shopstewards committee accusing him of intimidating members of SABS and issued final warnings to other shopstewards, 550 men and women struck and conducted a nine day 'siyalala'. Management agreed to refer the issue to arbitration.[140] At Barlows Manufacturing two months later in the Alrode branch, workers slept-in for nine days to force management to discuss a R1 an hour increase. The company capitulated and also agreed to complete talks on outstanding clauses in the recognition agreement.[141] At General Electric Company (GEC) Mawu members staged a sit-in of a different kind in May 1986 after they had fought a three year battle for recognition. About 300 workers struck to demand recognition, a R1 an hour increase, and reinstatement of 49 workers dismissed for participating in a go-slow. The union bussed 150 workers to GEC's head office in Parktown, Johannesburg, to deliver a letter to the Managing Director. First, they held a placard demonstration and then entered the offices where they sat down in a large hall refusing to leave until they received a response. Management agreed to meet and in subsequent negotiations it reinstated the workers and agreed to negotiate a recognition agreement, and to discuss wages.[142]

The ‘siyalala’ was clearly a powerful weapon which workers wielded with considerable success but it had its limitations. Ruiters, in similar manner to his assessment of the 1986 -1989 stayaways, argues for a political significance which went beyond immediate factory demands. He cites Cosatu press officer Frank Meintjies claim that “...the *siyalalas* could be seen as the workers' version of `governability` paralleling efforts in townships and schools to transform `ungovernability` into `people's power`, through people's courts and people's education.”[143] Such claims, however, appear to have little basis. Workers made no assertions that these occupations had a wider political purpose or that their actions were in any way linked to formal political programmes although their spirit of defiance was clearly influenced by township unrest. The Russian and Italian occupations unfolded in the context of widespread political debate, socialist movements, and formation of workers’ parties where workers’ control of the means of production was a stated objective. Most workers at Haggie Rand, for example, were new recruits who did not belong to political formations. Many were introduced to rudimentary forms of political analysis in the very process of participating in the ‘siyalala’. As shopsteward Kidwell Mvume explained, “We had to do education, educating our people. About our struggle, including political spheres around us.”[144] Mawu members may have come into contact with socialist ideas in the union, and would probably have encountered concepts of ‘people’s power’ in their communities, but such thinking was seldom linked to workers control of factories. Some Mawu members were active in UDF aligned community organisations but the ANC’s political programme did not advocate the seizing of people’s power through factory occupations linked to mobilisation within townships. Ruiters himself notes that, “MK (Mkhonto we Sizwe - the ANC’s armed wing) preferred the Narodnik tactics of bombing factories and company offices to the classical Marxist tactics which stressed preparing the working class for an armed general strike and uprising.”[145] Mawu workers were not armed, many had only recently joined the union, and their demands remained within the confines of the capitalist mode of production.

As the `siyalala` tactic spread it was rapidly neutralised by capitalists. Companies began to interdict strikers and obtained court orders against workers sleeping-in, and, if they did not adhere to the injunction, they brought police in to drive them out. A three day factory occupation at Dunlop Sydney Road over wages ended thus. At GB Engineering over 200 workers staged a sit-in against retrenchments and ignored a management court eviction order. The company called in the police who stormed workers with dogs, tear gas, and sjamboks, driving some through a plate glass window whilst 71 strikers were arrested and charged with contempt of court and damage to property.[146] Through tough responses like these, union members learnt the limits to the tactic although after each defeat they responded with new strategies. As Moses Mayekiso commented at the time of the Robert Bosch strike, “All companies must know that as they introduce new tactics of oppression, exploitation and victimisation, the workers will also devise new tactics to fight

back. The multinationals, and all metal companies, must know that the workers of today are not going to accept these exploitative measure lying down. They are going to fight back!"[147]

To return to the 1988 stayaway however. It was a success if measured by the numbers who participated but the possibility of a revolutionary seizure of state institutions, or appropriation of factories was never present. In fact, in August, to Cosatu's shock, the government announced the passing of the Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA) which was the Bill containing no changes. The state's determination to pass the Bill was its answer to the massive stayaway. This did not necessarily mean that the stayaway had failed as it was one moment in a prolonged power struggle, but it did indicate that the state did not perceive any immediate revolutionary threat. Tarrow has described revolutions as being at the extreme end of `cycles of contention` which are capable of `unhinging old institutions and the networks that surround them, and creating new ones out of the forms of collective action with which insurgent groups begin the process."[148] Wright sees the difference between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary politics as conflicts at the systemic level of power over which game to play, whilst Giddens using David Aberle as a basis for his definition specifies a revolution as a process of political change in which a mass social movement is able to seize power and subsequently initiate reform, "Transformative movements aim at far-reaching change in society or societies of which they are part. The changes their members anticipate are cataclysmic, all-embracing and often violent."[149] Gramsci viewed revolution as replacing the employers' authority in the workplace, and locating social life within a new framework. In this he contended that a party, whose role was limited to the seizure of political power, must lead the revolutionary action of the proletariat into a new form of proletarian self-government.[150] It would appear that few of these elements were present in South Africa at this time even if shopstewards were espousing socialist ideas and employing socialist slogans. Certainly a mass social movement was present but such elements as the preparedness to use violence, the presence of a worker's party to assist in the seizure of political power, plans or attempts to replace the employers' authority, a programme of reform to implement after the seizure of power which involved significant systemic change involving the `unhinging`of old institutions and their networks, were absent. A sincere and radical socialist lobby within Numsa existed but as previously discussed this was not in the main supported by other affiliates in Cosatu. Furthermore Cosatu only represented a million workers in 1988 and the additional two million who supported the June stayaway were unlikely to have held strong socialist views in the absence of a mass socialist party. There is no doubt that some Numsa shopstewards strove to play a leadership role at a wider political level but their organisational style and socialist politics were often viewed with suspicion. Unreserved support for Numsa's position either at Cosatu national level, or at a local level amongst civics and Cosatu locals, was never in evidence. Von Holdt, for example, in his study on Highveld Steel in the Witbank area, charts this contestation around Numsa's socialist politics in the factory, in locals, and in civic meetings.[151] Highveld shopsteward Lesley Nhlapo

recalls that Numsa emphasised political independence and organisational democracy and was prepared to criticise the ANC, "I supported that view myself, that the ANC must not act as God here. We as workers must not follow at their heels. They should bring an agenda and we should discuss it. Our people are not hopping around following the ANC wherever it is."[152] Yet despite his, and other shopstewards', insistence on democratic policies and practices in organisation they were not well received by all shopstewards in the factory or by community activists. This was especially true when Numsa shopstewards started questioning the political usefulness of the concept of `ungovernablity` in Witbank community organisations. Nhlapo again points out,

> The Numsa national views were seen by most people as contrary to ANC policies, the ANC way of operating...There were serious tensions between us as Numsa people and people coming from other organisations. You would come into a meeting and they would say that Numsa is here, there is not going to be progress. You were not going to be allowed to talk in a meeting if you were Numsa...Numsa was a threat to most people because Numsa wanted democracy - in terms of clear consultation, mandate-giving, and reporting back - was totally different from how other organisations saw democracy. People believed in executive powers more than involving the masses.[153]

Nhlapo was disturbed by this attitude and discussed it with national officials who told him that union leadership was encountering similar problems in most locals and regions.[154]

Ruiters tends to extrapolate a revolutionary potential mainly from the activities of Numsa members on the East Rand where in a number of locals the Ultra Left tendency dominated. It is true that the East Rand was one of the hubs of South African industry and the centre of the engineering industry but any revolution would need to carry national working class support. In any event Maseremule, who was a member of the Ultra Left grouping makes the point that from 1985 onwards a Cosatu alliance with the ANC `was inevitable`, "It was easy to relax with the alliance. It was never contested by any grouping."[155] The ANC was not pursuing a revolutionary socialist path and by 1988, in similar manner to the UDF, had discarded the call for `people's power` in favour of a negotiated settlement. This entailed forging links with a broad spectrum of interests within South African society including with white capital. Anglo American Corporation met with the ANC in 1986 and delegations of white businessmen began to meet the ANC in exile. In 1990 a broad-based gathering, the Conference for a Democratic Future, which followed the failed Anti-Apartheid Conference of 1988, was convened and included MDM delegates (including labour) and some representatives from homelands. By this time most workers and communities were taking their lead from ANC initiatives and its national democratic project and not from socialist vanguard Numsa shopstewards. Ultimately, despite a thought-provoking treatise, Ruiters romanticises the extent of socialist revolutionary infusion into the labour movement in this period and casts workers' impressive mobilisation in a more heroic light than evidence suggests. The socialist project was a highly contested area of political union life.

Ruiters argument is also weakened by his standpoint of analysing union life from a predominantly political point of view and not from the complexity of its bargaining and organisational responsibilities and accountability to membership in other arenas. When viewed in such a manner the picture is more complex and it becomes clear that there was a balance that Numsa officials were constantly trying to get right. They were employed to represent members' interests and their interests were both economic and political and these were sometimes at odds. If the class struggle at this time `embodied a revolutionary character` it was extremely fickle and had already shifted two months later. Workers may have been willing to sacrifice their jobs in the 1988 June stayaway but, except for on the Witwatersrand, a decline in militancy was almost immediately in evidence. When Numsa conducted a national strike ballot in engineering in August 1988 it was clear that workers were not willing to embark on national action whereas in the previous year, 1987, members countrywide had enthusiastically voted for such action. The 1988 national stayaway had taken its toll when 2 000 Cosatu members and 1 600 Nactu members were dismissed, whilst Numsa alone suffered 500 dismissals. Thousands of dismissal warnings were also issued. This appears to have alarmed workers. The union was thus obliged to conduct a regional strike on the Witwatersrand alone. By the early 1990s whatever `revolutionary` fervour existed, appears to have further diminished. Numsa national official Bobbie Marie noted the decay of local worker structures in the early 1990s and that "... the site for the generation of new ideas moved to the national level" [156] Divisions in the working class in the late 1980s also mitigated against the possibility of a genuine worker-led revolution. As will be explored later, these divisions were deep. The LRA campaign was in fact to set the union on quite a different path to that of revolutionary insurrection and would instead open up opportunities for the pragmatic syndicalists in Numsa. Following the passage of the law it was this organisationally minded group who immediately promoted discussion on how to manage the new labour relations framework. Initially this unfolded as a defensive response but as discussions, negotiations, delays, and mobilisation proceeded over a five year period (1987-1992) the possibility of negotiating an entirely new industrial relations framework became apparent. A dire situation had again been turned into an opportunity in a manner reminiscent of the 1980/1 pension strikes when Mawu successfully engaged the state and employers in a negotiated withdrawal of the 1981 Preservation of Pensions Bill. The old Fosatu unionists were often most resourceful when negotiating from an apparently weak position where they employed a set of carefully formulated demands against the backdrop of workers' power. The lengthy LRA campaign, which was to consume so much of Cosatu's resources, was ironically to prove a benefit. With each defeat, delay, or minuscule victory, Cosatu would demand more. What began as a demand to withdraw a draconian law became a demand fundamentally to revise the LRA. This evolved through a process of struggle and strategic discussion at each phase of the campaign.

The LRA campaign progressed through different phases all of which were characterised by

strategic discussion which involved research, education and information activities, bi-partite or tri-partite negotiations, and mobilisation and mass action. The scale of the mass mobilisation of the 1988 stayaway was not to be repeated, but it remained a weapon of the campaign as inevitably the power of the stayaway formed a backdrop to future tripartite discussions. Levels of energy and exhaustion influenced the evolution of the campaign as resistance activities ebbed and flowed over the years but Cosatu was tenacious in pursuing its opposition to the Act. Throughout this period Numsa emerged as one of the unions that sustained high levels of anti-LRA activities.

In the second phase of the campaign a number of strategies were pursued. The first was the concept of re-negotiating recognition agreements in order to bypass the LRAA.[157] This was successfully applied in the auto sector where the union negotiated with employers on the NBF to abide by the Saccola/Cosatu/Nactu agreement which had been negotiated before the passing of the LRAA and involved side-stepping contentious clauses in the Act. In addition it utilised the LRAA to negotiate a code of conduct with about 16 German companies based on the IG Metall 14 point code (see disinvestment section below). The agreement, amongst other things, incorporated the right to strike without fear of dismissal and allowed certain clauses of the LRAA to be bypassed. The union also adopted the tactic of passive resistance. As a Numsa organiser explained, "Management will have to negotiate with faceless people. Management would summon the union to deal with an illegal strike. To avoid damage claims the union will deny all knowledge of the strike. It will make things very difficult for management. Maybe workers will just make a placard and stick their demands on the wall."[158] Even a small claim could bankrupt the union. Thus the Witwatersrand region decided to `stand back` to protect the union from damage claims.[159] In early 1989 the union refused to intervene in wildcat strikes until the company waived its right to sue for damages. Monage recalls how he was dismissed for being on an illegal strike and the Industrial Aid Society, an organisation assisting non-unionised workers, had to pursue the case for him.[160] In the first two years of the legislation Numsa refused to assist in at least 40 illegal strikes until these companies waived their right to sue. Companies had believed that the threat of suing for damages would prevent strikes. In fact, it resulted in longer strikes. The ironies were manifold. At Lascon Lighting, Robor and Haggie Rand, for example, the companies refused to waive their right to sue. Lascon, following an illegal strike of 500 workers, obtained a court interdict ordering workers to return. They were successful but 15 days of non-production had elapsed. In the court's eyes the right to strike did not exist. Robor attempted to force the union to intervene in a strike citing the legal standing of a recognition agreement between them. Numsa refused and reminded the company that the new labour legislation had nullified the agreement. At Haggie Rand, 1200 workers downed tools. In desperation the company took the union to the Industrial Court claiming that it had committed an unfair labour practice because of its refusal to assist in settling the dispute. Hundreds of strikers volunteered to participate in the court case arguing that as members of the union the company should sue them for damages. The company was suddenly confronted with a

prolonged court case and an even longer strike. It agreed not to sue for damages and Numsa interceded and resolved the strike. Over time it became apparent that it was not in companies' interest to sue for damages.[161]

Simultaneously a broader worker unity on resisting the LRAA was being built. At a Workers Summit in March 1989, 700 worker delegates from a broad front of unions, including some Nactu affiliates, endorsed further negotiations with Saccola and drew up a list of six demands to present to employers. These were the right to strike and picket, no dismissals without proper hearings, no retrenchments without negotiations and fair procedures, recognition of majority unionism, and the right to secondary industrial action such as sympathy strikes. Employers refused to concede to these demands and Cosatu declared a dispute. Mass action and protest was once again embarked upon. At Cosatu's third Congress in July 1989 a decision was made for each affiliate to ballot their members on taking action arising from the dispute. Up to this point Cosatu had refused to enter direct negotiations with government but in a strategic shift it conceded that the campaign had overly targeted employers whilst ultimately it had been the state which enacted the law. Thus tri-partite discussions, which included the National Manpower Commission (NMC), evolved.[162]

At the second Workers Summit on 26 August 1989, which was `overseen` by heavily-armed police who recorded all discussions, ballot results were announced. These were problematic as although most workers voted for action, affiliates had balloted less than half of Cosatu's members. Numsa however had put enormous energy into the complex task of organising a national ballot[163] and together with TGWU, Ppwawu, and Sarhwu, had balloted over half its membership. It had balloted more members than any other union, in total 133 725 workers. The complexity of the task is illustrated by the fact that at Dorbyl, for example, the union balloted 7 000 workers at 50 different plants.[164] The NUM with the largest membership in Cosatu had only managed to ballot 80 118 workers, although, in its defence, access was difficult on some mines. Numsa workers voted overwhelmingly for action - 130 438 for and 2 284 against.[165] Despite ballot deficiencies the Summit decided on short stoppages or demonstrations in all factories on 1 September followed by a two day national stayaway from September 5 -6 to protest the LRAA and the staging of the racist white elections on 6 September. Thereafter a month-long consumer boycott of white-owned shops would commence on 13 September accompanied by an overtime ban. In a significant extension of the aims of the campaign the Worker Summit also resolved that in the long-term workers must develop a new LRA to cover all workers including farm, domestic workers, and public servants.[166]

The stayaway was observed by large numbers of workers although significantly on the first day only 39 per cent of workers on the Witwatersrand came out. This rose however to 72 per cent on the second day.[167] Pre-mobilisation activities were clearly not as thorough as in 1988 although in other parts of the country, such as the Western Cape, numbers taking part were greater. By late

1989 a significant shift in the state's stance was perceptible fuelled by the sustained pressure exerted by labour and the shift in the political climate. The Minister of Manpower spoke of rescinding the damages clause, and the NMC invited proposals on a revised LRA. In February 1990 President de Klerk's decision to unban political organisations unleashed a deluge of political protest of which the anti LRAA demonstrations formed a part. On March 30 the NMC published various proposals on amending the LRA including a proposal that it should cover all workers. Negotiations with Saccola also progressed when they conceded that the 1988 amendments had been destructive to labour relations and that the labour law needed redrafting. In May Cosatu and Nactu signed the `Saccola Accord` with Saccola agreeing to basic rights for all workers, and abandoning the most destructive clauses.[168]

The Minister however, under pressure from right-wing cabinet members, announced that the LRAA would only be amended in law in 1991. Protest action which included marches, demonstrations, and a Cosatu leadership sit-in at the Department of Manpower offices was relaunched putting in mind Tarrow's observation that, "In cycles of contention the polity respond not to the claims of movement but to the degree of turbulence."[169] In negotiations that followed the upsurge in protest action, agreement was reached on establishing a joint working party to resolve the impasse. Cosatu again took the opportunity to expand union demands. Finally, at a meeting of all parties on 13 September 1990 `the LRA minute` was signed which agreed that all workers should have basic rights, including the right to join unions and bargain collectively. It agreed that the NMC would prepare a bill extending rights to farm, domestic, homeland and public sector workers. The unions agreed to sit on a restructured, transparent NMC.[170]

Baskin remarks that, "The LRA campaign must be included among Cosatu's major achievements"[171] Hundreds of thousands of workers had participated and the education that had accompanied it which imparted a complex understanding of labour legislation. Omissions in the law became apparent to workers such as the absence of the right to strike and to picket, and the exclusion of farm, domestic, and public sector workers. In the final months of 1990 the Commission for Administration conceded the inclusion of civil servants under labour legislation.[172] Significantly too, for the first time, labour had not only established the right to be consulted, but was playing an active role in the development of labour policies through it participation on the NMC on an equal basis with employers and the state. In Macun's definition of working class power Cosatu and its affiliates had entered the arena of shaping institutional rules and regulations which included the power to shape these institutions.[173] It was still a limited power as it related chiefly to the shaping of rules in the industrial relations arena but it was a significant victory for labour nevertheless.

The LRA tri-partite negotiations opened a window of opportunity for the leadership in Numsa as it

revealed the possibilities of a negotiated accommodation with capital and the state. As Erwin described it, "...you needed space to move. To get that space you had to engage with capital, and the then government. We, by chance, discovered that through the 1988 negotiations on the LRA...We really need to engage and understand these processes, understand industries, engage with government, we have to have long-term strategies."[174] This approach was driven by the syndicalist tendency in the union and coincided with the decline in influence of the Ultra Left in 1990. From 1990 onwards the union engaged in an increasing number of bi- and tri-partite forums in the social, industrial, macro economic, and political spheres. This accompanying specialisation, as previously described, would result in a growing gap between the leadership and base although in an irony the co-determinist approach was promoted by a group in the union which had always been concerned to promote workers' control and democracy.

The LRA campaign although focussing on labour relations matters was nevertheless expressed as a highly political one. Initially it exerted pressure on capital as a means of in turn pressurising the state to withdraw the amendments. Later it assumed an expressly political form and exercised pressure directly on the state directly and from a basis of power was able to force significant concessions. It was only when the state and employers came under sustained pressure that they began to weaken. As Hyman has observed, "Power is not quantifiable, it becomes manifest only once put to the test"[175] Cosatu's mobilisation however never posed a threat at the systemic level. In Wright's formulation the power struggle was located in the arena of `reformist versus reactionary politics` which `are conflicts at the institutional level of power over attempts to transform the rules within which situational conflicts occur."[176] Cosatu was successful in `transforming the rules` but the capitalist state remained in tact.

3. Disinvestment: Politics of Pragmatism

Introduction

The dominance of the syndicalist approach in the organisational life of Numsa yielded a highly pragmatic politics. This was evidenced in the way the union managed the disinvestment issue. The principle of isolating the apartheid regime and calling for the withdrawal of foreign interests from South Africa was supported by all groupings within Numsa but how practically to manage this commitment was a different question.

Between 1985-1986 the international campaign for sanctions and disinvestment which was endorsed by the ANC and Sactu, gathered momentum.[177] Fosatu was not entirely in sympathy with the unconditional ANC/Sactu call. This confronted Fosatu with a dilemma since if it did not support the sanctions lobby it would be aligning itself with employers and conservative homeland leaders such as Chief Buthelezi, while an uncomplicated adoption of the campaign also posed

dangers. Thus it typically adopted a more nuanced, flexible position. In a policy statement Fosatu identified three interrelated issues which it believed would render international pressure effective. It related disinvestment to the building of worker organisation via the international solidarity of labour which could exert pressure on multinational companies operating in South Africa. Secondly it supported disinvestment pressure through such measures as terminating borrowing facilities to the government. In the arena of existing foreign assets however it was more ambivalent. Calling for the disinvestment of foreign companies in their entirety posed the dilemma of `sacrificing jobs now for liberation later`. The political decision to support sanctions conflicted with its trade union role of protecting its membership against job loss. Furthermore it believed that although the legal ownership of assets resided with the foreign company it was South African workers who had developed and rendered these concerns profitable through their sweated labour. Thus such assets constituted an integral part of the wealth of the country and Fosatu could not comprehend the logic of sacrificing jobs or wealth generating assets.[178]

It was Cosatu however which had to manage the practicalities of companies disinvesting. At its launching Congress in 1985, it resolved fully to support the disinvestment campaign in an apparently pro-Sactu stance, but the riders it added indicated that it was essentially adopting the Fosatu position. It contextualised its resolution by committing itself to ensuring "that the social wealth of South Africa remains the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all ... "[179] At its second Congress in 1987 it further qualified its views by calling on companies to give unions adequate notice of the intention to disinvest and requiring them to negotiate their terms of departure.[180] The organisational details of how to implement this policy however remained vague as it "dumped the problem back in the laps of twelve affiliate unions."[181] For Numsa it was a question of skilfully managing both the political and economic implications. Thus it pursued a cautious approach which entailed the avoidance of any campaign which actively called for disinvestment, whilst it simultaneously made a high profile demand around companies' manner of withdrawal. Thus it appeared to be both supporting and managing the disinvestment campaign.

A Cosatu Sanctions Study completed in 1987 defined disinvestment as occurring, "When the foreign company closes or sells its S.A. operation and withdraws, repatriating what assets it can."[182] Strictly speaking however disinvestment should be more narrowly defined than this and restricted to a *political* response by multinationals to *political* pressures from anti-apartheid mobilisation in countries outside of South Africa. Numerous companies withdrew from South Africa in the mid 1980s but the reasons varied from political instability, to falling profits and other economic concerns. Few companies openly aligned themselves with the political protest call for disinvestment. In the manufacturing sector most foreign investment emanated from the United Kingdom, the United States and West Germany respectively and was primarily located in metals, machinery and equipment, chemicals, rubber and plastics.[183] The UK and German companies

encountered little domestic pressure to disinvest especially as conservative governments held sway in both countries. Disinvestment from South Africa thus developed as an almost exclusively US phenomenon.[184] US anti-apartheid activists who witnessed the escalating violence and repression in South Africa decided to focus on large corporations rather than on forcing the conservative Republican US government to break ties with the Nationalists, or on direct solidarity with exile organisations. They launched a robust campaign to force the enactment of US legislation which would put pressure on US companies to disinvest from South Africa. The result in 1986 was the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act [185] as well as strong state and local regulations restricting investment of public funds, and preventing the award of contracts to firms that either invested in, or conducted business with, the South African government. These laws and regulations had a huge impact on US companies. Academic Glenn Adler recalls an auto industry executive commenting that it was a choice of doing business in South Africa or in New York.[186] Prior to this, corporations, including the large auto companies, and the US government had retreated behind the promotion of the Sullivan principles or the argument that large corporations were a source of progress.[187] Cobbett et al note that it was doubtful that the moral factor played a large part in disinvestment. It was more likely that the `hassle factor` produced results. South African investments were a tiny proportion of US multinationals' incomes and thus time spent in boardrooms discussing responses and difficulties with South African subsidiaries was hardly worth the trouble.[188]

Disinvestment assumed different forms but in most cases the withdrawing US company avoided losses and in some cases was able to conduct South African business from a distance. Companies disposed of valuable assets cheaply but minimised their losses through the provision of supplies, and through payments made by local companies for a variety of franchise and licensing arrangements. Domestic capital too benefited as they acquired solid and profitable concerns at bargain prices.[189] Naawu, Mawu and later Numsa observing the ideological impact of disinvestment which rendered South Africa a pariah in world politics, were also confronted with the irony that local capital often had worse labour practices than the departing company and that sell-offs left workers unprotected and highly vulnerable. In a document which emanated from the Cosatu Sanctions Study, the Federation rather glibly dismissed the opposition to sanctions grounded in the argument that job losses would result. It contended that "Foreign Investment cannot solve the unemployment problem in S.A. Foreign companies only employ 1 250 000 people (i.e. 1.25 million)."[190] At a Cosatu Sanctions Seminar in March 1987 to consider the Study, Mawu was recorded as being the only union that had fully discussed sanctions and had held a National Seminar on the question. Its view was more complex. It argued that selective sanctions were hurting the working class more than the capitalists as their impact was being experienced in specific regions of South Africa alone,[191] and that a number of foreign governments were imposing sanctions as a means of protecting and/or promoting their own industries. Thus it believed that

sanctions should be applied in a more comprehensive manner. The Cosatu study, for example, believed that comprehensive sanctions should include an end to foreign loans to the state, the closure of all South African embassies, an end to emigration from South Africa, the banning of landing rights for SA Airways in all countries, the freezing of all South African capital investment abroad, and a ban on the recruitment of skilled overseas workers from outside South Africa.[192] It also insisted, and this was agreed upon at the Cosatu seminar, "that Sanctions must hurt capitalists and not workers" and thus "job losses and everything (on companies [sic] withdrawals) should be negotiated and fought for." Naawu endorsed this view and Numsa inherited the policy. They believed that departing companies should take responsibility for their workforce especially as the possibility of retrenchment and unemployment could follow their exit. Thus together with Cosatu's chemical union, Numsa emerged in the forefront of struggles for negotiated disinvestment. It should be noted however that these unions engaged selectively with the ANC's call for comprehensive mandatory sanctions. It was the experience of the Coca Cola withdrawal and the threat by the Swedish subsidiary SKF in the Eastern Cape to withdraw that forced them to focus on the disinvestment issue. At no point did they engage in systematically negotiating withdrawal with foreign companies operating in South Africa. They engaged with the disinvestment question only when companies announced their intention to withdraw. In effect, they rhetorically supported withdrawal but did little to ensure it happened on any scale.

Negotiating disinvestment

In 1986 Naawu had its first experience of negotiating a disinvestment agreement for its membership when General Motors (GM) Corporation, a US auto company in Port Elizabeth, announced its withdrawal from South Africa. It was a fumbling, pressurised and belated response. In October 1986 over 2000 black workers at GM Motors, downed tools and staged a sit-in at the company's canteen against its manner of withdrawal. This protest was the first action by workers on the disinvestment issue. The press, management and the government presented it as an anti-disinvestment stance despite the union's careful stress that the action was not an attack on the disinvestment lobby but an attempt to implement the Cosatu resolution that the wealth created by South African workers should not be removed by the departing company.[193]

For some time prior to this action business at General Motors had been depressed for reasons previously outlined in the auto industry. It was in the wrong location for a market that was based on the Witwatersrand, and its plants were technologically backward. It was looking to withdraw and the new US sanctions legislation provided a good pretext. Workers learnt through a company statement in the newspapers[194] that it was selling out to a South African buyer through a licensing agreement which provided for access to technology, designs, and components. They immediately requested the release of their pension contributions, severance pay, and the right for two Naawu members to sit on the new company's board of directors. GM argued that the conditions of

employment would remain unchanged in the new company and thus refused to accede to any demands or to provide workers with any information, including the name of the purchasing company (it was in fact Delta Corporation). As a consequence Naawu and Macwusa came out on a rare united strike and occupied the factory.[195]

Simultaneously in Johannesburg, Naawu, Micwu and Mawu held a joint NEC to develop the first set of guidelines on company disinvestment from South Africa. They stipulated that reasonable notice must be given to workers and that withdrawal must be negotiated. Such negotiations should include full details of the company's future plans, a severance package which guaranteed full pay for a year period after disinvestment, guaranteed continuation of benefits, full job protection after sale, and agreement that the future company recognise and negotiate with representative unions.[196]

Naawu presented GM with the demands. GM's response was to summons the SAP and SADF to effect a late night eviction of workers. A dismissed striker remarked on management's hypocrisy, "Bob White, he was the general manager, said we could swim at apartheid beaches and GM would pay the fine. He tried to make himself popular by saying GM opposed apartheid. But when we went on strike because they were pulling out without even informing us, he used the same apartheid police to try and crush us. They brought the whole army in to break our occupation. There are still seven GM workers in detention today."[197] Thereafter the company dismissed 567 workers and locked the gates to prevent workers from reoccupying the factory. The dismissed workers struggled on assisted by Naawu and support committees in the community but without success. In 1987 a dismissed worker commented bitterly,

> My feeling is that our struggle has been swept under the carpet by Cosatu. The issue is so important. I'm talking about the livelihood of 500 workers and the struggle to strengthen the sanctions weapon through worker action. We have to bring the thing home somehow. We have been on strike for nearly six months now; our unity and spirit is still strong; our demands are still there. What we need is solidarity action.[198]

GM represented the first large auto disinvestment operation from South Africa and it marked a defeat for the union. It alerted the union to the difficulties and costs associated with disinvestment. This was reflected the following March when Cosatu Vice-President, Chris Dlamini dismayed the anti-apartheid sanction lobby by stating in an interview with the BBC that Cosatu supported sanctions yet had never called for firms to get out of South Africa.[199] Through the GM workers' struggle however the union had alerted companies to their responsibilities on disinvesting and had established a set of guidelines for them to utilise in order to depart in a fair manner. The union had lost at General Motors but it had shamed and besmirched the company's name. Thus when in November 1987 Ford decided to disinvest it was concerned not to repeat the GM's manner of going.

Ford had come under pressure from the US sanctions campaign and in consequence sold off to a South African company, Samcor, through a licensing agreement to supply Samcor with technology and management skills. The company negotiated its withdrawal with Numsa. The course of these negotiations was described in Chapter 10 where it was recorded that Numsa emerged deeply embarrassed when workers struck in rejection of the negotiated Worker's Trust and against Numsa's attempts to retain the company's wealth in South Africa for everyone's benefit, in favour of individual worker pay outs. Samcor, commentators in the US, and the union had viewed this as a progressive disinvestment exercise. Naawu's Fred Sauls commented, "This is the first time a disinvestment arrangement has given any real content to Cosatu policy - namely that while disinvestment is desirable, the wealth must remain the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all."[200] The source of workers' confusion and discontent was unclear especially as Sauls believed workers had given the union a clear mandate to proceed with the establishment of a Trust. He partly blamed former Macwusa members for contributing to the confusion and reflected that "...we must be careful to have much more intense discussion and seminars on a grassroots level instead of a few mass meetings that last for one hour. Workers must be fully aware of what they are entering into and we have been sadly lacking in doing that."[201] Workers claimed they had understood they were to receive R4 000 on disinvestment when dividends were cashed in. In further negotiations, following the strike, workers accepted the company offer of a one-off payment of R700 to each worker and for the remainder to be deposited in a worker/community trust.[202] Subsequent disputes in NUM, Numsa and Satawu (SA Transport & Allied Workers Union) have also revealed that if workers were misled into believing in the possibility of a cash pay-out which did not materialise, confusion and at times violence ensued. An opportunist third party misleading workers, the lack of on-going discussion and education by the union on the issue, and worker self-interest all seem to have been factors in the Samcor members' dispute with Numsa. The union learnt that in an atmosphere of suspicion and threat it needed to proceed with great caution and extensive consultation.

In 1987 a rare, and highly strategic disinvestment struggle was conducted in the engineering sector in Mono Pumps. Mono was owned by American Brands but was managed by its UK subsidiary, Gallagers Limited. The company which manufactured mining and agricultural pumps had 10 branches spread across South Africa and employed 350 workers. In April 1987 the chairman of American Brands announced that Gallagers was selling Mono Pumps as a result of "...the deteriorating political and business environment in South Africa" and "reiterated its strong opposition to the apartheid system."[203] Gallagers management then informed workers that they should continue working as usual. The US holding company adopted a hands off approach and the burden of withdrawal became the responsibility of its UK subsidiary.[204] In this manner it would appear that it hoped to avoid the spotlight of the US anti-apartheid lobby.

The union rapidly secured an undertaking that all jobs would be safeguarded in the buy-out. This gave it the leverage to demand that the company concede the right to bargain wages at plant level, and the right to strike. Gallagers insisted it would not dictate terms to any future buyer. In response Numsa members conducted lunchtime demonstrations at the factory in support of their demands. Local management which was interested in buying the firm and was concerned to ensure a good relationship with its future workforce, conceded to both demands. Subsequently Malbak bought the company and accepted all local agreements with the union.[205] Thereafter the union commenced negotiations with Gallagers UK. After discussion with members, Numsa demanded severance pay for the 32 years that the company had profited from workers' labour and a worker-controlled trust fund to assist with workers' education and housing needs. Gallagers refused. In response Numsa launched an international campaign. The union contacted the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK, which in turn alerted its affiliates to apply pressure on Gallagers' head office. Numsa also contacted the US Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Actwu) which launched a campaign in support of the Mono workers. Employing US anti-apartheid legislation it co-ordinated the signing of a letter by members of the US Congress to the chair of American Brands calling on the board to discuss the sale. The company did not respond. Charles Hayes, an influential US congressman, sent a further letter noting the failure of the company to negotiate with the union. Shortly afterwards Gallagers agreed to a workers trust fund.[206]

The severance pay issue remained. Workers staged a half day stoppage in support of their demand and spent useful time with two US Actwu representatives who visited workers in South Africa. Actwu then brought a resolution to American Brands' annual shareholders' meeting in an opulent hotel in New York whilst South African workers simultaneously staged a placard and banner demonstration in South Africa. At the meeting, Actwu read a detailed and emotive letter from the Mono shopsteward's chair. Its resolution was supported by 3 million of the company's 82 million shareholders which Actwu believed sent a `strong message to the directors.` Later in the same week a Gallager's director met with the union and agreed to a trust fund of R200 000. A further R200 000 was allocated to be shared equally between all Mono workers.[207]

The dispute demonstrated a sophisticated union that was thoroughly familiar with the use of multiple tactics to pressurise international companies. The disinvestment dispute was ultimately no different from numerous others it had conducted which involved the concertation of rapid international mobilisation, strategically held local demonstrations, a set of clear demands to negotiate, and importantly, consultation and full participation by members.

A disinvestment struggle in June and July 1989 conducted at Goodyear Tyres represented the final struggle of this kind. By the end of 1989 it was becoming clear that negotiated change was in the offing and that the sanctions issue would soon be a thing of the past. It was probably also the last

of the heroic strikes of the 1980s.

On disinvesting, Goodyear, a US multi-national, sold the company to Consol. The union demanded at least R5 000 severance pay for every worker, the recognition of existing conditions of employment, the pay-out of pension monies and the writing-off of housing loans. The company refused and 1 200 workers submitted notice of strike action and downed tools.[208] It was the first legal strike in the auto sector of the union since the Eveready strike in 1978 and continued for a mammoth 13 weeks.

Gavin Hartford was Numsa's Goodyear organiser and he described a strike of astonishing unity accompanied, for the times, by an absence of coercion and violence.[209] In the first seven weeks strikers occupied the factory to prevent the entry of replacement labour. Thereafter, despite it being a legal strike, Goodyear locked them out. Strikers continued to meet in the Jubilee Hall in Uitenhage. Despite the risk of a dual power situation evolving, as witnessed at Highveld Steel in the mid 1980s, a strike committee devoid of shopstewards and consisting of 65 activists, many SACP and ANC members from Uitenhage, was constituted to assist in conducting the strike. In this instance however it performed a disciplined and effective role. The shopstewards committee focussed on negotiations. The strike committee met before and after every general meeting to assess workers' morale and to discuss individual's needs. Discussion ranged from how to assist a worker with a sick child, to campaigning in the community, to how to approach shops to request delays on the repossession of furniture when workers could not fulfil their hire purchase payments.[210]

Strike organisation was reminiscent of Mawu's Dunlop Sydney Road strike in 1984. Workers clocked into the strike as they did into the factory every day and an attendance roll was maintained. According to Hartford this was, "... very important so that everyone knew what was going on. As long as there was no smoke coming out of the bamboo where they mix the rubber then workers knew there was no production."[211] Management terminated workers employment three times only to be confronted by them burning their termination letters. At times negotiations would cease for up to three weeks, "...especially at that seven week period which is always critical in a strike. There was a logjam, stalemate, no negotiations. The company's position was to give no severance at all...I was panicking by seven weeks, hearing day after day about this one or that one`s medical problem, and nothing happening, and just enduring. "[212] It was at this point that crucial solidarity actions took up the slack. The union had solicited both local and international solidarity. It approached the United Rubber Workers in the US but in contrast to Mono workers' experience of Actwu met with little support. The Uitenhage black community however offered unconditional solidarity. It ensured material support and a complete absence of local scab labour in an environment of deep recession. "There were 14 guys left in the factory, and by the seventh week

there was nobody." recalls Hartford.[213] The union also mobilised blacking action. Explained Hartford, "We knew of the *Fatties and Monis* and meat consumer boycotts [conducted in the early 1980s]. Now the issue was to change a consumer boycott into a production boycott. To stop the supply in, and the supply out."[214] In response Volkswagen and Mercedez Benz Numsa members refused to handle Goodyear tyres in week seven of the strike. Hartford remembers,

> Bosses hate solidarity action with a passion. They really hated us. We could bring shopstewards from Mercedes Benz to the Jubilee Hall, and Volkswagen to announce the results of their action at their plants on Goodyear Tyres. The response was wonderful, they were absolute heroes. Real kind of old style labour solidarity... and that just raised spirits and sent workers on to the 13 weeks ...The bosses definitely got together because these bosses worked in the same building and this was the heart of the Eastern Cape economy, the motor industry and assembly plants and tyre plants. So they knew each other well, small town stuff.[215]

Nevertheless it took another five weeks of negotiations before Goodyear came forward with a reasonable offer. Agreement on job security, and payouts that ranged between R6 - 8 000 for the lowest paid and the highest at R25 - 30 000 depending on years of service were negotiated. This covered wages for the 13 weeks of strike plus an excess. The company also agreed to write-off employee housing loans individually worth between R 3-5000. The shopstewards were delighted but the offer still had to be accepted by the strike committee which was not present at negotiations and where hints of a dual power situation had developed. At a joint meeting of the strike and shopstewards' committees nobody came forward to recommend acceptance to the workforce which was solidly united in militant defiance. Thus the decision on whether to accept the offer or not was forwarded to a general meeting. Hartford recalls the moment of settlement,

> Shopstewards were petrified of their members they had gone down so far. You don't tell your members what to do at that point, they know what to do, you just follow. In the general meeting, I reported and people asked questions, and there were old men at the back of the hall, and one old man stood up with his pipe and said in Xhosa, `Comrades we went out to shoot the buffalo but we only got the koedoe but it's OK we can take it home`. Then it was a totally unanimous decision and we settled the strike.
>
> We made a banner about working class power and socialism which was huge and we worked the whole weekend on this banner. And we marched from Jubilee Hall to Goodyear which is about 3ks along a big main road in this small conservative white AWB [Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging] town. When we went back into the plant we went into this huge hall with the whole of management there, and this huge workforce queuing up and getting reinstated, and the bosses had to go through the charade of re-signing on and they got new clock cards. And I remember standing up and making a radical speech in front of the bosses about our victory and our pain. After that we had organisation in the plant second to none.[216]

Disinvestment: a bargaining weapon

The disinvestment issue was undoubtedly one of the most awkward international issues with which the unions had to contend. On the one hand, workers, for whom actual disinvestment threatened

jobs and security, were understandably ambivalent, even if they supported the broad call for comprehensive sanctions. On the other hand, whilst overseas anti-apartheid bodies were not always sensitive to the union's acute dilemma, employers were keen to demonstrate to an overseas audience how unions opposed the practice of disinvestment whilst supporting sanctions in theory. Likewise, at home in South Africa, they sought to demonstrate that job losses from disinvestment could be blamed directly on sanctions. In the event, the weight of these conflicting pressures was somewhat reduced by a decline in the rate of disinvestment. Only 25 US companies, for example, withdrew their direct investments in South Africa in 1988 compared with 57 in 1987.[217] Southall speculates that this was in part due to Cosatu's success in impressing on US companies that they could not exit without admitting their social obligations.[218]

The disinvestment campaign presented the union with a dilemma yet this dilemma also offered opportunities. Its demands on disinvesting companies had chiefly been applied to US companies. With other companies, however, such as those of the Germans who were showing no inclination to disinvest, its tactical approach was different. In characteristic manner Numsa unionists turned a weapon designed to weaken the unions, namely the state's promulgation of a new Labour Relations Act in September 1988, against its intended beneficiaries. Its point of departure was that if companies continued to do business in South Africa, they must by-pass the LRAA and not benefit from apartheid laws. The largest German metal union, IG Metall, approached the South African Co-ordinating Council of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) to discuss some form of solidarity. Two working groups from IG Metall arrived in South Africa in 1988 and engaged in discussions with IMF unions. The result was a 14-point code which the unions aimed to utilise to put pressure on South African German companies to restore rights lost through the new LRA, to extend these rights, and to address additional problems which the political system imposed on workers. The principle underlying the code was that foreign companies operating in South Africa should operate according to the minimum legal standards enjoyed by their West German counterparts. The most important provisions in the code were the recognition of the right to strike without fear of dismissal, the right to picketing facilities on company premises, an agreement not to jeopardise workers' company accommodation in the case of strike-related dismissal, the payment of full wages for workers detained or sentenced under apartheid security laws, readiness to negotiate with the representative union including reasonable union access, shop steward rights and company meeting facilities, and the referral of labour disputes to arbitration.[219] The union also aimed to utilise this code to address a number of issues that pre-dated the new LRA which had resulted in strikes and instability in the industry.[220]

Thereafter Brian Fredricks, a former Naawu organiser and later IMF Assistant General Secretary, recalls successful negotiations that ensued at the Jan Smuts Airport (now Johannesburg International) to achieve a signed in-principle agreement with 15 German companies. On the one

side, negotiations were conducted by the South African German Chamber of Commerce which was headed by many of the main German employers in the metal industry, and on the other, the union negotiating team consisted of Brian Fredricks from the IMF, Albert Schunk of IG Metall, and Fred Sauls, Bernie Fanaroff and John Gomomo from Numsa. Following the acceptance of the 14-point code, the IG Metall agreed to exert pressure on companies in Germany to adhere to it and to adhere to other international labour norms such as ILO conventions on workers' rights.[221] In December 1988 six German multinationals, namely BMW, Volkswagen, Mercedes Benz, Siemens, Robert Bosch and Hella, agreed to implement the code. Later however, they qualified their acceptance to the in-principle agreement claiming that it was necessary to adjust the points to render them company appropriate and thus individual company negotiations were necessary. Although this prolonged the process it allowed for flexibility and the union was successful in negotiating its acceptance in a number of German companies. Maseremule recalls how individual company negotiations sometimes produced surprising results. In one relatively small German company on the East Rand he won a 21 day right to strike without dismissal, "When I told Geoff [Schreiner] what I had negotiated, he couldn't believe it."[222]

Fredricks claims that the issue of disinvestment did not surface in negotiations around the 14-point code.[223] Yet clearly an inconsistency existed for the union in negotiating the terms of operation for German companies whilst supporting sanctions and disinvestment. The union was adopting a dual and contradictory position whereby it utilised its rhetorical support for the disinvestment campaign as a weapon in its fight against the LRA and to further worker rights. Disinvestment may not have been directly discussed at these negotiations but it certainly formed a back-drop to such discussions. At the time the union justified its approach by arguing that, "Companies operating in South Africa …must…at the very least declare themselves prepared not to benefit from this undemocratic system."[224] Fredricks, maintained that "It would be wrong to describe it as an attempt to sway opinion on disinvestment – but as long as multinationals are operating here, they should operate within these guidelines."[225] Gomomo however recalls a more strategised approach that underpinned the union's bargaining with German companies. "There was an understanding that we supported disinvestment but if you agree to bypass apartheid laws we won't put pressure on you. Our starting point was that you must build a strong trade union movement but if you don't have members you can't pressurise the apartheid government to accede, and the whole economy will be down on its knees. We couldn't stand up and say this. But we used it [disinvestment call] to get them to sign an agreement on trade union rights."[226]

Thus Numsa's approach to disinvestment was highly strategic. On the one hand it was able to project itself as ideologically committed to the isolation of the apartheid regime but on a pragmatic organisational level it was able to continue to defend its members. Over time it was able to wrest considerable concessions from departing US companies whilst for those companies unwilling to

depart it was able adeptly to balance its opposition to the LRA against rhetorical support for sanctions. Its use of international strategic interventions was an important weapon in the undermining of government's attempts to undercut the unions' hard won gains. The tension in its two positions may ultimately have imploded but, as Southall points out, by 1988 the rate of US disinvestment had declined significantly, and by 1989 the political landscape had fundamentally altered as the possibility of political negotiations became imminent.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of the different tendencies in the union's political life It has demonstrated that whilst the Charterists held sway in the ideological terrain, the syndicalists increasingly took over this role through engagement in the pragmatic areas of union life. The LRA tri-partite negotiations opened a window of opportunity for the syndicalist leadership in Numsa as it revealed the possibilities of a negotiated accommodation with capital and the state. The ascendancy of this approach coincided with the decline in influence of the Ultra Left. From 1990 onwards the union engaged in a growing number of bi- and tri-partite forums in the social, industrial, macro economic, and political spheres.

In the contestation both within the union and with other affiliates in Cosatu, Numsa moved away from the powerful lobby of the independent worker-centred socialist ideology held by former Mawu members to, by 1989, an acceptance of a broad front against apartheid which could even include a strategic alliance with capital. The dilution of its socialist politics was symbolised by a diminution in the divisive political debates that had characterised early Cosatu Congresses where debates were often conducted most intensively between the NUM and Numsa. Ultimately it was Numsa in the interests of unity which made the greater shift. By 1989 a more unified Cosatu had emerged but Numsa's `one stage` socialist vision had been progressively eroded

Cosatu and Numsa's national mobilisation frequently expressed through impressive stayaways did not pose a threat at the systemic level. In Wright's formulation the power struggle had been located in the arena of `reformist versus reactionary politics` which `are conflicts at the institutional level of power over attempts to transform the rules within which situational conflicts occur."[227] Cosatu was successful in `transforming the rules` but the capitalist state remained in tact. Whilst accepting that abrupt revolutionary systemic change was not likely, the union was nevertheless determined to insert a working class political perspective into any future political dispensation as a negotiated political settlement became more in evidence. The following chapter traces Numsa's attempts to inject a working class perspective into the transition period utilising its influence within a tripartite political alliance.

ENDNOTES

[1] Interviews Bethuel Maseremule Johannesburg, December 2002; Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.
[2] *The Freedom Charter* in Luckhardt, K and Brenda Wall (1980) *Organize or Starve: The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
[3] The Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) a loose alliance of anti-apartheid groups consisting of political, civic, and labour organisations (including Cosatu) was formed in 1989 and replaced the UDF.
[4] Interview Bethuel Maseremule Johannesburg, December 2002.
[5] Interview Tony Kgobe, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[6] *Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision for Numsa Education and Research Department (undated but probably 1993)
[7] "Interview: Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of Numsa" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 2 June 1989.
[8] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[9] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[10] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[11] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69 "The Freedom Charter and the struggle for socialism" NC May 1987 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[15] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69 "The principles of working class alliances" NC May 1987 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[16] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002
[17] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:218): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[18] Ibid, p 219
[19] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69 "The principles of working class alliances" NC May 1987 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[20] Baskin, Jeremy (1991: 218): *Striking Back*
[21] Interview Joe Nene, Durban, February 1997.
[22] Interview Mike Mabayakulu, Durban, February 1997.
[23] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[24] In 1989 Cosatu had 924 499 paid up members and Numsa 188 013 paid up members.
[25] Sparks, A (1995) "Tomorrow is Another Country" William Heinemann, United Kingdom.
[26] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[27] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[28] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[29] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[30] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[31] The trade union movement in Brazil held many similarities to the South African trade union movement but unlike South Africa the unions had formed a Workers' Party, Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in the early 1980s following a series of militant strikes in Sao Paulo, Brazil's industrial heartland. Lula, a former metalworker headed the party. Initially viewed a `workerist` minority party, over a 10 year period it popularised its programme and its opposition to authoritarian military rule in both rural and urban areas through democratic popular councils. The PT appealed to workers whose unions faced repression, to landless peasants, to the unemployed, and the poor lacking adequate housing and services. It also over time managed to attract support

from middle class Brazilians who opposed IMF austerity programmes. Its platform was inclusive and acknowledged the diversity of interests that made up the working class whilst not abandoning the specific interests of the industrial working class. It struggled with issues such as how to balance the need for participatory democracy whilst working within political institutions. The Party's structure, in similar style to Numsa, permitted the existence of differing tendencies and encouraged internal debate. In 1989, when the syndicalists in Numsa were observing its progress with interest, the PT came within 6 percentage points of winning Brazil's first open elections since 1960 (and later did in fact come to power). (*The Workers Party and democratisation in Brazil* Keck, M (1992) Yale University Press; *Without fear of being happy: Lula, the Workers' Party and Brazil* Sadir, E and K Silverstein, (1991) Verso Press.)

[32] R Rocker *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1989: 95) Pluto Press London.

[33] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth 1997. `The Movement` referred to the movement for liberation, namely the ANC.

[36] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.

[37] Radebe was murdered in Alexandra township in 1999 in a criminal act.

[38] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.

[39] The other accused were Obed Bapela, Richard Madakane, Paul Tshabalala, and Mzwanele Mayekiso, Moses' brother. Mayekiso had been detained twice before this and workers had mobilised for his release. He was detained after the 1984 stayaway and charged with subversion. The IMF approached the South African government to drop the charge which carried a 25 year sentence. It was dropped when witnesses fled the county. In April 1986, following ten days of insurrection in Alexandra township where at least 32 people were killed, police arrested community leaders including Mayekiso. Mawu launched a national work stoppage to demand his release and metal workers responded in large numbers. In the Transvaal alone, 17 000 workers struck. In Durban workers staged an illegal march carrying `Free Mayekiso` placards and union banners and linked up with other workers in the industrial area of Pinetown. Sydney Road Dunlop members were tear-gassed and some arrested as they marched to link up with Hart workers. Workers immediately struck to force police to release the workers. A number of employers, including Seifsa, responded to Mawu's request to send a telegram to the Minister of Law and Order requesting Mayekiso's release. He was released with other detainees thereafter. Mayekiso commented that he had been interrogated on his Alexander Action Committee activities and that, "The guy who was interrogating me felt that I was not giving him the right story so he beat me up." (*SA Metal Worker* Vol 1 No1 1986; *Fosatu Worker News* No 37 1985; *Umbiko we Mawu* Vol 4 No1 Apr 1986; *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No 5 Apr/May 1986.)

[40] *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 8 February 1989.

[41] Dirk Hartford collection "State in a bid to link Alex 5 with `total onslaught`" *Cosatu News* May 1988.

[42] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid*, 1980-1994 Routledge, New York/Great Britain.

[43] Interview Daniel Dube, Port Elizabeth, 1997.

[44] *Weekly Mail* 31.10.1986; *Weekly Mail* 20.11.1987.

[45] *Comrade Moss* (1989) Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust & Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.

[46] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.

[49] Ibid

[50] Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.

[51] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.

[52] Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.

[53] `Democratic trade unions and the struggle against apartheid` O'Meara, D in *Labour Capital and Society* (1985: 418), Vol 18, No2, Montreal.

[54] "Roads to Cosatu Congress" *Work in Progress* No 59, Jun/July 1989.

[55] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[56] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:349): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[57] University of Witwatersrand, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers Box AH 2555/B69 *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992* "Introduction to Congress Resolution NC May 1989".
[58] "Interview: Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of Numsa" *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[59] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[60] "One Union, One Industry" Robyn Rafel *Work in Progress* 65, April 1990.
[61] Interview Alistair Smith, Johannesburg, November 1966.
[62] Numsa*: Insimbi Ayigobi* video produced by Afravision..
[63] Numsa Second Congress 1989 JHB 18 -21 May, Numsa video, Cosatu video archives.
[64] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69 "The process of political settlement" NC May 1989 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[65] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69. "Political Policy" NC May 1989 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[66] Numsa Second Congress 1989, JHB 18 -21 May, Numsa video, Cosatu video archives.
[67] "Political Policy" NC May 1989 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992* in University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69.
[68] "Political Policy" NC May 1989 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992* in University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Interview Tony Kgobe, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[71] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996
[72] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents department, Cosatu Papers Box AH 2373/5.3
[73] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department, Cosatu Collection Box AH 2373/4 "Resolutions passed at Cosatu Special Congress, May 1988"
[74] Ibid.
[75] "Roads to Cosatu Congress" *Work in Progress* 59 June/July 1989.
[76] "Interview: Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of Numsa" *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[77] Baskin, Jeremy (1991:350): *Striking Back.*
[78] Ibid.
[79] At least 50 000 thousand mineworkers lost their jobs in a 1987 strike and were never reinstated – many of them from Anglo American mines. The memory of the defeat, he knew, still smarted in Cosatu and the NUM.
[80] Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back.*
[81] *The Cosatu Platform on Worker Rights* in Patel, Ebrahim ed (1994) *Worker Rights: From apartheid to democracy – what role for organised labour?* Juta & Co Ltd, South Africa.
[82] Patel, Ebrahim ed (1994) *Worker Rights: From apartheid to democracy – what role for organised labour?* Juta & Co Ltd, South Africa.
[83] Ibid, p29.
[84] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[85] In the 1989 resolution the union again called for "..the urgent need for a Working Class Political Programme and its discussion at all levels of our organisation." ("Political Policy" NC June 1991 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992* in University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69.)
[86] Fantasia, Rick (1988:238) *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press.
[87] Focus group Numsa Vaal Region, September 1997.
[88] Focus group Numsa Western Cape Region, September 1997.

[89] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[90] Cosatu's main Living Wage demands were a living wage, a 40 hour week, no tax deductions, job security, March 21, May 1 and June 16 as paid public holidays, retrenchment pay of one month's salary for every year employed, , 6 months paid maternity leave, decent education ad training, the right to picket, decent housing. (*Living Wage Demands* Cosatu Second National Congress Report 1987, personal copy)
[91] "Worker Power on May Day" *South African Metal Worker* Vol 1 No 2/3 June 1986.
[92] *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1986, Vol.11 No 6 1986.
[93] A. Levy, *Annual Report of Labour Relations In South Africa*, 1986-1987.
[94] Fine, A. (1987) `Trends and Developments in Organised Labour' in *South African Review* 5, in Moss, G. and Obery, I. (eds) Ravan Press: Johannesburg.
[95] Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back.*
[96] Ibid.
[97] `Viva Comrade Moss` campaign *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 6 Sept 1988.
[98] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[99] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[100] Labour and Community Resources Project (Lacom) Sached Trust (1989): *Comrade Moss* Learn and Teach Publications, Johannesburg.
[101] Abel, Richard L (1995): *Politics by other means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994* Routledge, New York/Great Britain.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics: A Case Study of Collective Action and Leadership in Katorus, *1980-1989* MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
[104] "Trade union members should be involved in community struggles, community organisations and political organisations... The judgment is proof that there is nothing wrong with that. It proves that the structures we are advocating in the unions are structures that we can use in the townships...In the case it became clear that our aspiration is a socialist society. There is nothing wrong to have socialist aspirations..." ("Interview: Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of Numsa" *South African Labour Bulletin*).
[105] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[106] Interview with Professor Nic Wiehahn, *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 5, November 1989.
[107] Procedures for pursuing a legal strike were also rendered highly complex. In addition employers would be given the right to retrench without consultation. The power of the industrial court was also reduced through the listing of unfair labour practices in the Bill. The amendments also permitted employers to bargain with the union of their choice regardless of representivity by declaring it an 'unfair labour practice' for a union to prevent an employer from negotiating with the union of its choice. For years employers had imposed the 50 +1 majority union formula as the baseline for union recognition which had resulted in arduous battles for union recognition. Now that unions were growing in size and militancy, representivity was irrelevant. (Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back.*)
[108] "One union, One industry" *Work in Progress* 65 April 1990.
[109] "Labour Bill: Metal workers make new proposals on Bill" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No3 March/April 1988.
[110] Quoted in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol 13 No 3 March /April 1988.
[111] "Mass Action Against the Bill" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 3 March/April 1988.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[114] Focus group Numsa Wits Central, 1998.
[115] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[116] Interview Elias Monage, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[117] *Weekly Mail*, 11 August 1989.
[118] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[119] *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 4/5 1988:37.

[120] *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1988, Vol.13 No 3 Mar/Apr 1988.
[121] Numsa Witwatersrand, Minutes of Special Regional Congress, 17 May 1988 quoted in Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[122] "It's testing time for Cosatu" *Work in Progress* No 54 June/July 1988.
[123] "Stayaway survey, June 6-8 The Labour Monitoring Group" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 6 September 1988.
[124] *Business Day*, 9 June 1988.
[125] Focus Group Numsa Western Cape, September 1997. Vazi had worked as an organiser in both Natal and the Western Cape and is thus comparing his experiences of the two here.
[126] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[127] Von Holdt, K. (2000:127) From Resistance to Reconstruction: A Case Study of Trade Unionism in the Workplace and the Community (1980 - 1996), PhD, University of the Witwatersrand.
[128] Ruiters, Greg (1995): South African Liberation Politics.
[129] Ibid.
[130] *"Political Policy" NC May 1989* University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69.
[131] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[132] Interview Geoff Schreiner, Durban, February 1997.
[133] Crouch, Colin (1982) *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action* Fontana , Great Britain.
[134] Ruiters, Greg (1995:204): South African Liberation Politics.
[135] *Fosatu Worker News* "Brits Factory Occupied" September 1985.
[136] Interview Peter Dantjies, Pretoria, June 1997and *South African Labour Bulletin* "Asea workers for all level bargaining" Vol 11 No 4 Feb./Mar 1986.
[137] Green, Pippa (1986:3/4): "Haggie-Rand Workers Sit Tight for R3,50" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 11 No 4 Feb./March 1986.
[138] Ibid; Focus Group Numsa Wits East Region, August 1997.
[139] *South African Metal Worker* "Strike Diary: Dorbyl" Vol 1 No2/3 June 1986.
[140] *South African Metal Worker* "Strike Diary: Barlow Manufacturing " Vol 1 No2/3 June 1986.
[141] *South African Metal Worker* "Strike Diary: Barlows Manufacturing Company " Vol 1 No 4 July 1986.
[142] *South African Metal Worker* "Three-year GEC battle ends" Vol 1 No 4 July 1986*; South African Metal Worker* "GEC recognition talks grind to a halt" Vol 1 No 5 Aug/Sept 1986.
[143] Ruiters, Greg (1995:205): South African Liberation Politics.
[144] Focus Group Numsa Wits East Region, August 1997.
[145] Ruiters, Greg (1995:206): South African Liberation Politics.
[146] *Umbiko we Mawu* "Sleeping in for power" Vol 4 No1 April 1986; Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, (Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg).
[147] Moses Mayekiso quoted in *Fosatu Worker News* "Brits Factory Occupied" September 1985.
[148] Tarrow, S (1998:24): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
[149] Giddens, A (1993:643): *Sociology* Second edition fully revised and updated, Cambridge Polity Press.
[150] Davidson, Alistair (1977): *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, Merlin Press Ltd, Great Britain; Williams, Gwyn (1975) *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Communism in Italy 1911 -1921*, Pluto Press, Great Britain.
[151] Von Holdt, K. (2000:127:129) From Resistance to Reconstruction, PhD, University of the Witwatersrand.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, p130.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[156] *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 5 1990.
[157] The policy of bypassing the contentious provisions of the new LRA was laid out in a Numsa

resolution taken at its 1989 National Congress (*"Labour Relations Act " NC May 1989* University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69.)

[158] Baskin, Jeremy (1991: 292): *Striking Back.*

[159] Ibid.

[160] Interview Elias Monage, Johannesburg, August 1997.

[161] "Briefings: Fighting the LRA" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 2 June 1989.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Interview Bernie Fanaroff, Johannesburg, 1996.

[164] "Strikes and Disputes – 20 May to 28 July" *Work in Progress* 60, Aug/Sept1989.

[165] Baskin, Jeremy (1991: 292): *Striking Back.*

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Tarrow, S (1998:10): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

[170] Baskin, Jeremy (1991: 292): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu,* Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.

[171] Ibid, p452.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Macun, Ian (2000): Growth, Structure and Power in the South African Union Movement in Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997, eds G Adler & E Webster, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.

[174] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.

[175] Hyman, Richard (1972:110) *Strikes,* William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow.

[176] Wright, E O (1994:539) "Political Power, Democracy and Coupon Socialism" in *Politics and Society* Vol 22 No 4.

[177] A cultural boycott was first called by Father Trevor Huddleston in an article in the British *Observer* on 10 October 1954. The concept was rejuvenated in the 1960s when a sports boycott was launched by anti-apartheid activist Peter Hain and over time developed into the call for a total boycott of the regime. This included calling for foreign investors to withdraw from any participation in creating wealth for the apartheid regime.

[178] Southall, R (1995) *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions* University of Cape Town Press.

[179] "Cosatu 1985 Inaugural Congress, November 29-Dec 2: Resolutions", personal collection.

[180] "18 July 1987, 2nd National Congress Report" personal collection.

[181] *Sunday Times* 19 July, 1987.

[182] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Cosatu Special Topics: Sanctions/Disinvestment AH 2373, 12.32 "Sanctions, Disinvestment, Retrenchments and the Coal Industry".

[183] Ibid.

[184] There were exceptions such as the British Barclays Bank which withdrew in 1986 after a major British based campaign, including a student boycott and account withdrawals by a number of local authorities. (Cobbett, W and Robin Cohen "Introduction: Popular Struggles or One Struggle: Dilemmas of Liberation" Cobbett, in William and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa: Review of African Political Economy*, African World Press, New Jersey.)

[185] Although a conservative government was also in place in the US which called for "constructive engagement" in South Africa, the US Congress passed the sanctions legislation despite President Reagan's veto.

[186] Personal correspondence Glen Adler January 2003.

[187] Southall, R (1995) *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions* University of Cape Town Press.

[188] On withdrawal from South Africa US company ITT commented that South African sales represented one-tenth of one per cent of its global sales. (Cobett, W and Robin Cohen "Introduction: Popular Struggles or One Struggle: Dilemmas of Liberation" Cobbett, in William

and Robin Cohen (eds) *Popular Struggles in South Africa: Review of African Political Economy*, African World Press, New Jersey.)

[189] Ibid

[190] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Cosatu Special Topics: Sanctions/Disinvestment AH 2373, 12.32 "Sanctions, Disinvestment, Retrenchments and the Coal Industry".

[191] It noted that its impact was being felt in the Western Cape food industry, Northern Natal sugar industry and in the transport and steel industries.

[192] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Cosatu Special Topics: Sanctions/ Disinvestment AH 2373, 12.32 "Report on Cosatu Sanctions Seminar held on 25-26 March 1987".

[193] Southall, R (1995) *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions* University of Cape Town Press.

[194] *SA Metalworker* "Tamboer: still on strike" Vol 2 No1 Mar/Apr 1987.

[195] For a full description of the strike and issues surrounding it see: "The Strike at General Motors" Adler, G Adler *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 12 No 1 Nov/December 1986.

[196] Ibid.

[197] "Solidarity with striking GM Workers" *Cosatu News* No 4 May 1987, Dirk Hartford collection.

[198] Ibid.

[199] *South African Institute of Race Relations* 1987/88.

[200] "Samcor - workers strike against share ownership" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 6 September 1988.

[201] *Weekly Mail* 4 May 1988.

[202] "Samcor - workers strike against share ownership" *South African Labour Bulletin*.

[203] "The Mono Pumps disinvestment story" Adrienne Bird *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 6 Sept 1988.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid

[207] Ibid.

[208] "Briefings - disinvestment strike" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 3 1989.

[209] The only recorded violence was the firebombing of the house of Joe Sapotela, the chief shopsteward at Goodyear, probably by rightwing elements. Sapotela escaped unharmed, but his brother burnt to death. (*Work in Progress* 60, 1989 `Repression: 20 May to 28 July').

[210] The following description of the strike is based on an interview with Eastern Cape organiser Gavin Hartford in Johannesburg, October 1996.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

[217] *South African Institute of Race Relations* (SAIRR) 1988/1990:344.

[218] Southall, R (1995) *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions* University of Cape Town Press.

[219] "The IG Metall Code, the LRA and disinvestment" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 2 June 1989.

[220] Ibid

[221] Written communication with Brian Fredricks, July 2004.

[222] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, July 2004.

[223] Written communication with Brian Fredricks, July 2004.

[224] "The IG Metall Code, the LRA, and disinvestment" *South African Labour Bulletin*.

[225] "Living with the LRAA" *Work in Progress* 56/57 Nov/Dec 1988.

[226] Telephonic interview, John Gomomo, July 2004.

[227] Wright, E O (1994:539) "Political Power, Democracy and Coupon Socialism".

Chapter 14

Compromising the Socialist Economic & Political Agenda: The Legacy of the Alliance

1. Introduction

The previous chapter charted Numsa's political development in the period between 1987 -1990 and its changed position on the nature of alliances it was willing to forge. It was nevertheless determined to pursue strategies which would insert a working class perspective into the national politics that was emerging. This it pushed through the politics of alliances. The union appreciated that alliances could augment labour's power when forged with organisations confronted by a common enemy. It also understood the dangers that alliances held as organisations pushed to further their own political positions and to establish hegemony.

Whilst intense conflict was unfolding in Natal and on the PWV, the country was moving into a period of transition. Following the release of the first group of political prisoners in September 1989, Numsa was abruptly confronted with an altered political landscape for which it was not prepared. Just a few months before Mayekiso had declared, "`I also don't believe that negotiations are near. There will be a negotiated settlement at some stage, but at the present moment those chances are nil."[1] Numsa's Education Department responded by embarking on seminars around the concept of a negotiated settlement to inform its leadership of negotiated options available and to acclimatise it to the possibility of change.[2] Following the unbanning of political organisations in February 1990, Numsa rapidly organised strategic think tanks to ensure that the labour movement inserted meaningful interventions into the new developments and was in the position to influence the ANC's under-prepared blueprint for the assumption of power. The union movement was facing its final challenge before South Africa embarked on its first democratic elections. Would it be able to insert a socialist programme into this transitional situation or would it fail workers' expectations of a worker-led socialist dispensation? Many theoreticians have pointed to the limitations on trade unions to effect fundamental change. Lane, for example, explains these limitations thus, "... trade unionism was about power: about the power of organised labour to confront the power of organised capital and to insist on the regularisation of the relationships between them. Trade unionism was a standing and continuing assertion of a fundamental cleavage of interest, yet simultaneously, because of its insistence on the regulation of that conflict, it could not be a vehicle of its abolition."[3] Anderson asserts that, "As institutions trade unions do not challenge the

existence of a society based on a division of classes, they merely express it ... They bargain within the society, but do not transform it."[4] Webster Pityana et al and Von Holdt[5] however all point to the dual nature of trade unionism in South Africa and the contradictory role that the shopsteward leadership played. Webster notes that South African shopstewards differed from their British counterparts owing to their leadership role in political organisation which meant that their identities were forged by both class contradictions at the point of production and by their role in the political struggle. This opened up the possibility for shopsteward leadership to operate as agents of systemic change in the manner that Gramsci had envisaged representatives of *commissione interna* to operate.

This chapter will assess Numsa's attempts at injecting a working class, socialist standpoint into a new democratic dispensation in the closing days of apartheid.

2. Forging Alliances

The July 1989 Cosatu Congress had called for the launch of a Defiance Campaign against 'all unjust and discriminatory laws' through peaceful mass defiance of apartheid facilities and institutions.[6] This included a parliament elected through a whites-only ballot. Thus Cosatu called for a two day stayaway on 6 September 1989 to protest the whites-only elections which returned the Nationalists to power. The 1990 unbannings resulted in the intensification of this Defiance Campaign. A spirit of disobedience, harnessed by the MDM, swept the country. Political detainees conducted hunger strikes to demand their release, banned individuals and organisations defied their restrictions, and hundreds of blacks flocked to whites-only beaches.[7] The democratic movement organised marches throughout the country to protest security laws and demonstrators for the first time legally displayed the banners of the ANC and other political organisations. Cosatu played a pivotal role in leading such defiance countrywide.[8] The political climate was both heady and unstable and police intervention was highly unpredictable.[9] The Defiance Campaign augmented militancy on the factory floor, and in response a number of employers summonsed police into disputes, and dismissed and locked out workers. FW De Klerk, now president, announced the repeal of the Separate Amenities Act and finally recognised the de facto May 1 as Labour Day.

The defiance spread uncontrollably to South Africa's Bantustans. Strikes, marches and demonstrations assailed Ciskei, Venda, Gazankulu and Bophuthatswana. Workers` demands ranged from a living wage and union recognition, to calls for the resignation of Bantustan leaders, to the reincorporation of homelands into South Africa.[10] Phil Bokaba, a shopsteward at ATC, Numsa's Second Vice President, and a Cosatu Regional Secretary recalls the emergence of open organisation and defiance in Bophutatswana,[11]

> I was an activist in my township where I lived in Ga-Rankuwa. On 11 February [1990] we established a Garankuwa Civic Association and I was the general secretary. Bop

> [Bophutatswana] at that time was not co-operating with Cosatu...Mangope was using his security forces. I had to be booked into a hotel for three months in Pretoria because every night I was getting visitors from Mangope's security police, me and Jerry Thibedi. Jerry's house was bombed. Once about 65 police surrounded my house, and luckily I came back from the shop I saw all these people round my house so I turned back.
>
> In February, we had a march in Ga-Rankuwa which was attended by 250 000 people around re-incorporation into South Africa...That march, 11 comrades were shot and killed, and I was hunted day and night but they could not come to my workplace because Brits was South Africa...
>
> The second march was in March where we were joined by people in Soshanguve and Mabopane. It was very big about 200 000. I went to work the day after to see what was happening but only about 20 per cent of people had come to work. There was no transport, buses were burnt, taxis were not running. We asked to speak to the people who are working. Management refused so we called a meeting in work hours and workers decided we can't work whilst others are not at work and our homes are being visited by Mangope's security.
>
> When I returned to work the following week, I was escorted from the company premises with a letter saying the company was investigating serious charges against me of inciting and influencing workers to down tools and go home... I was dismissed in May 1990. They claimed I called the meeting without permission - gross insubordination, and three others were also dismissed. Then workers went on strike for about three months for our reinstatement... After three months we decided workers must go back to work and it took 13 months to take the case to arbitration... The arbitrator said we should be reinstated.[12]

Meanwhile, in the wake of the unbannings, following a number of meetings between Cosatu, the ANC, and the SACP, an historic political alliance was forged in June 1990. It was termed a strategic `fighting` alliance which embraced the common goal of seeking "a fundamental political and economic transformation of South Africa into a unitary, democratic and non-racial country based on the demands of the Freedom Charter..."[13] Thus Cosatu replaced Sactu in the ANC/SACP alliance.[14] Each organisation was to remain independent and to develop its own positions on issues and campaigns within these broad goals. It was agreed that the ANC should lead the alliance on the basis of it claims to represent the oppressed people which were greater in number than the organised workers. All decisions would be made on the basis of consultation and consensus. Chris Dlamini, Cosatu's Vice-President, assured Cosatu's members that, "...we will take decisions by consensus - all decisions will be in the interest of all three. So we do not foresee domination...they [all three members] have the immediate objective in seeking to end apartheid and replace it with a democratic, non-racial system of government."[15] The alliance was to operate through a national secretariat and a political committee, joint executive committees and regional and local structures. It also aimed to build a broad front of patriotic forces with other democratic formations.[16] The alliance was endorsed at the May 5 1990 Cosatu Central Executive Committee (CEC) where Cosatu also committed itself to building a mass based ANC.[17] It was a significant moment and represented, in Ross' analysis of trade union forms, a move from `autonomous` to `party ancillary'. Mawu, Naawu, Micwu and early Numsa had fallen into the relatively rare category of

`autonomous` unions in that they were `neither clearly subservient to, nor clearly dominant over either party or state.`[18] With the formation of the alliance Cosatu, and naturally Numsa, moved into the more common `party ancillary` position, which in Ross' definition, involves a tendency to identify with a specific party and is accompanied by the existence of two or more national confederations which are often distinguished from each other in political terms. This shift would inevitably have consequences for the union's political and economic programmes and would confirm a drift in the direction in which Cosatu had been moving for some time.

The majority of Cosatu members appeared content with such an alliance despite some criticisms that the CEC was not representative of worker opinion in the manner that a Cosatu National Congress was.[19] Following the legitimation of political organisation many Cosatu leaders joined the ANC, SACP, or both. This was the case in Numsa where, for example, such national leadership figures as Erwin, Mayekiso, Gomomo, and Godongwana[20] joined the ANC and SACP. In Mayekiso's case, after the relaunching of the SACP as a legal mass organisation in July 1990, he was elected part of its internal leadership. Erwin contends that the majority in Numsa viewed the unbanned ANC and the SACP as the logical political destination,

> ...when [Joe] Slovo [SACP general secretary] made his move in 1990 the bulk of the [Numsa] leadership went into the communist party [SACP]. Once there was a feeling that there was a home for the left in the ANC the majority of people moved. There was a lot of debates within Numsa where it was argued that there was no alternative home for the left other than the ANC. It was a very longstanding movement, which had survived a lot, and the contact with the leadership opened up more and more. The basic argument was the ANC is the leading force and we need to strengthen an alliance with Cosatu and the ANC and SACP. There were some still opposed to that but at the end of the day not very many... For the Numsa leadership who went into the party it was that the party offered the only serious home for the left and socialism.[21]

It should be noted that although closely linked with the ANC, by the mid 1980s the SACP had begun a process of asserting its independence from its more dominant partner. From 1985 onwards the ANC progressively withdrew from its 30 year dependence on the Soviet bloc and sought to strengthen ties with the capitalist West especially as the US, Britain, and other European and Scandinavian countries moved to endorse comprehensive sanctions. Simultaneously it was becoming more acceptable for internal organisations, including business, to consult the ANC in exile. This gave the ANC a new legitimacy and resulted in its movement towards a negotiated accommodation with capital.[22] In the 1980s the SACP for its part was shaken into action by the presence of an internal growing, but autonomous union movement, which was making a hegemonic claim on the anti-apartheid movement.[23] In 1986 it abandoned its guerrilla warfare strategy and adopted a policy of urban insurrection. From this year onwards it engaged in a new debate around such concepts as the role of a vanguard party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the relationship between democracy and socialism. This discussion resulted in a new party programme which was adopted at its 1989 Congress. SACP general secretary, Joe Slovo, in the

8th Congress Report and in a reflective critique in 1989 of the SACP's past positions and on the future of socialism concluded that, "The lessons of the past failures have to be learnt. Above all, we have to ensure that its [socialism's] fundamental tenet - socialist democracy - occupies a rightful place in all future practice."[24] This new emphasis on transparent democratic practice, according to Slovo, meant that the SACP's new programme,

> ...holds firmly to a post-apartheid state which will guarantee all citizens the basic rights and freedoms of organisation, speech, thought, press movement, residence, conscience and religion; full trade union rights of all workers including the right to strike, and one-person one-vote in free and democratic elections. These freedoms constitute the very essence of our national liberation and socialist objectives and they clearly imply political pluralism... We remain protagonists of multi-party post apartheid democracy both in the national democratic and socialist phases...
>
> We also believe that if there is real democracy in the post apartheid state, the way would be open for a peaceful progression towards our party's ultimate objective - a socialist South Africa... It follows that in truly democratic conditions, it is perfectly legitimate and desirable for a party claiming to be the political instrument of the working class to attempt to lead its constituency in democratic contest for political power against other parties and groups representing other social forces.[25]

It was these shifts within the SACP that allowed many Numsa unionists to move into the Party and to reconcile their former suspicions about its Stalinist legacy. Membership inevitably entailed a relationship with the ANC as they were historically inextricably linked. Slovo's articulation of a multi-party democracy where a socialist party had to win allegiance to its programmes thus fitted comfortably together for those wishing to satisfy an allegiance to both the ANC and a socialist future. Thus ended the tradition of the Mawu stand-off in relation to the SACP.

After the unbannings in 1990, talk of Cosatu and the SACP forming an alliance circulated as their concerns with promoting working class interests were clearly congruent. Such a pact envisaged the possibility of a socialist united front to counter the ANC's growing liberal capitalist tendencies. An independent workers' party held the possibility of forcing the popular ANC to honour its leftist commitments. Elements in Cosatu, including Numsa through leadership figures such as Mayekiso, made overtures to the SACP but despite its superior strength, these were not reciprocated by the Party.[26] A close relationship with Cosatu would have allowed the Party ready access to grassroots worker leadership and membership which it lacked. As Erwin commented, "The weakest part of the SACP's platform is it says nothing about how you should organise the working class."[27] As far back as 1984, the SACP had taken a resolution at its Sixth Congress in Moscow to recruit from trade union ranks and to this end it published *Umsebenzi* which was directed at shopstewards.[28] Yet it aimed to organise the working class more broadly and Cosatu's membership constituted only a section of this constituency which it hoped would lead the masses to revolutionary socialist change. By its eighth Congress in Johannesburg in December 1991 delegates were expressing a reluctance to commit the SACP to a socialist democracy and previous vanguardist definitions of

the party resurfaced. Intellectuals in Numsa were however moving in a different direction. Since the fall of the communist Eastern European bloc the syndicalist group argued ever more strongly for the primacy of `democratic socialism` as a means of achieving true worker democracy and the SACP's ambivalence in this regard alienated some in this group.[29] The SACP also expressed a concern at the possibility of weakening the thrust of the national democratic transformation by allying itself too closely with Cosatu at the expense of its old ANC ally. There were differences in their stated paths to socialism as well. The SACP asserted strong anti-capitalist sentiments which expressed itself in the rejection of any form of negotiated accommodation with capital or the state. Cosatu meanwhile in the early 1990s was beginning to explore the possibility of corporatist arrangements in relation to political and other social matters. Ultimately the SACP abandoned its uncompromising position in favour of political negotiations which it justified as being just another `terrain of struggle`,[30] but in 1990 wide differences appeared to separate the organisations. The impact of such an alliance should not of course be overemphasised as the SACP was still a small minority party which had not achieved widespread popular support. In a survey of shopstewards in September 1991, for example, 94 percent expressed their intention to vote for the ANC but only 3 per cent for the SACP.[31] Erwin commented that `in terms of shaping action in Numsa it [SACP] probably had zero influence' and that it chiefly impacted `on an emotional broad political level`.[32] Historic links with the ANC rendered the SACP more influential than its small membership reflected and by failing to combine with Cosatu it forewent an opportunity to pressurise and influence the hegemonic ANC. It was in this context that advocates of an SACP/Cosatu pact in Numsa and elsewhere in Cosatu had by 1992 turned to notions of `radical reform` in an attempt to bind the ANC to a left-wing perspective.[33]

Maxwell Xulu: An independent Marxist?

There were some however amongst Numsa's leadership who supported the creation of an independent worker's party but who did not advocate an alliance with the SACP. Maxwell Xulu, Numsa's president, advocated the formation of a socialist party in direct opposition to the ANC's liberal democratic profile. Rooted in Mawu he had been associated with a strong`workerist` position and was hostile to the ANC's pro-capitalist sympathies and to the SACP's `Stalinist` legacy which, until the fall of the communist Eastern bloc, he saw as being `a foreign policy tool of Soviet imperialism.`[34] In 1991 he was accused of spying for the apartheid regime, a revelation which sent shock waves through the union and broader left community. Two labour journalists recall the reception of the news thus,

> In mid-November, an announcement on SABC/TV stunned us all in Natal: local worker leader and President of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa Maxwell Xulu has been suspended by Numsa's central committee for being a Security Police informer. After the news and the shock, phones started ringing, bus and taxi ranks started arguing, and everybody talked on and on, in disbelief. In Claremont especially, the township that ministers to Pinetown's labour needs, Xulu's home and power-base, the confusion was at its greatest: `Who? Maxwell? Max? An informer? An impimpi?[spy]

Working for the Enemy?"[35]

Numsa's Central Committee (CC) had been confronted with such evidence from ANC intelligence a while before when it was told of how Xulu informed on meetings of Numsa, Cosatu, and other political organisations. The evidence originated from the ANC's security department which it claimed had been garnered over a two year period. An ANC externally based intelligence unit had gathered the information as part of Operation Bible which it conducted between 1988-1993 to unearth apartheid spies who had extensively infiltrated its ranks.[36] Godongwana, through his ANC connections, had been informed prior to the union and had suspected it was untrue and was part of a plot to discredit `workerist` Numsa members. In consequence he recommended no further investigation.[37] The ANC however threatened to reveal the information if the union did not act. Numsa head office thus confronted Xulu and asked him to account for his actions. Xulu's response was "to demand evidence rather than denying the allegations".[38] The NEC debated the issue and focussed on his reaction, which was viewed as `suspicious` and `arrogant` rather than on the evidence to confirm the information.[39] On receiving no satisfactory answers from Xulu the union decided to suspend him until the following Numsa Congress. Xulu expressed dissatisfaction with the accusations and the manner in which he had been suspended and urged General Secretary, Mayekiso, to implement an inquiry. He argued that the decision was not reached in a transparent manner and referred to power struggles in the union where `a white intellectual` plotted his downfall owing to policy differences. He invited office-bearers to view his bank account to assess if his income reflected the possibility of receiving money from `the system`[the state]. He noted that when membership requested proof they were confronted with reports, and not bona fide `documents`.[40] Numsa appointed a committee to investigate and in October 1992 it reported that the Numsa CC's decision was final.[41] It explained however that it was difficult to release documents to members because the information emanated from ANC undercover agents working in state structures who could not be revealed.

An unease, which persisted, overlaid the decision. Mayekiso, who had worked with Xulu from Mawu days, said at the time, "We as office bearers of Numsa have always worked very closely, especially when dealing with problems, and there was trust between us. I trusted him a lot. That is why when I came across this information I could not believe it. It took me a lot of time to accept it. This was the most difficult decision of my life."[42] Xulu was widely respected by thousands of workers, and was their undisputed leader. His credentials were impeccable. He was a Mawu member in the 1970s where at his workplace, Smiths Industries, he was central to struggles for recognition; he was an important figure in Fosatu; he served on Cosatu's first executive as treasurer; and he was the backbone of the Pinetown local which recruited thousands of workers in the early 1980s.[43] Numerous Numsa members and officials testified to their disbelief. Nikita Vazi, a Western Cape motor organiser, said in 1996, "I must say that comrade was one of the good

comrades I have ever come across. He wasn't selfish, he would share his ideas. When that thing came out, one of the shopstewards asked, `what are we doing in Numsa if the person that I admired is doing this.`"[44] A former Numsa vice president, Percy Thomas' words recall Xulu's importance in the merger process and also demonstrate Xulu's suspicions, of the maybe disempowering impact, of officials, "We had GS meetings for years and not coming to any conclusion. Then we had an NEC, Max and Khayo Madlala came to me, and we sat down with them, and Max said let's take this process away from the officials. Let's handle this on our own. Max was very instrumental in that PE (Port Elizabeth) meeting. We said let's just discuss this merger quickly and we had a process."[45] Union people too felt uneasy about Xulu's appeal hearing. As Thomas recalls,

> I was asked to chair the appeal hearing... I wasn't at the office bearer's meeting in the evening where they had discussed the issue and subsequently suspended him. I had to chair the appeal... I never saw any of the evidence. Max came in and said he had not seen it. We gave him time...we set a meeting for a couple of weeks later. Officially Maxwell didn't come to his appeal. So there was nothing to prove or disprove any of the allegations. No evidence was presented at the appeal.[46]

Fanaroff has noted that the union was informed by ANC intelligence that Xulu had filed reports of meetings with Cosatu, ANC or SACP office bearers but no reports of Numsa meetings. Khayo Madlala, a shopsteward serving on Numsa's executive at the time, also noted that "…among those reports were some about meetings I had been at, but which Max had not attended." although he acknowledged that he had reported on these meetings to Xulu.[47] Mayekiso also at the time conceded that the evidence seemed flimsy but that it had come from `reliable sources`.[48] The debate at the July 1993 Numsa Congress also reflected disquiet around the suspension. Southern Natal reported, "It was discussed in the region and discussed in all the structures - but there are still problems at the grassroots. There is a question about the procedure - was it the correct one? The comrades feel the CC was not empowered to expel him and it should have been done by this house."[49] Northern Natal and Border Regions however expressed confidence in the expulsion. Border expressed it thus, "It was a political issue and we cannot live with rats in our houses."[50]

Questions persisted however as to his motive, "What was the motive? It can't be money... Maxwell is like all of us, two shirts, a jacket and a matchbox place.[township house] Where's the bonus?"[51] Alec Erwin commented that the information Xulu ostensibly passed on to the security police did little damage to the union,

> The interesting thing about his activities was that he did not... expose anything about what Numsa itself was doing in taking certain steps to deal with the violence in KwaZulu/Natal, and he was party to some of that information. Nowhere in any of the documents shown us through the espionage done by the ANC did he ever disclose this...I think it did some damage but I don't think it ever implicated the union. It would have influenced Numsa policies but not decisively.[52]

Xulu did not seem to be motivated by a desire to damage the union but what of Xulu's defence that a certain `white intellectual` had plotted his downfall. Maseremule dismisses such a possibility on

political grounds as Xulu as a solid workerist from Mawu days had always held much sympathy with this group although he continued to advocate a one stop to socialism when the syndicalists were settling for two stages. It was true however, Maseremule asserts, that Xulu had a complex relationship with white intellectuals as did other comrades in the union. “Max was a solid thinker…There was discussion in the union on how people manipulated to enforce their positions. White intellectuals had the advantage of reading and had learnt the art of dealing with their opposition [in the union]and undermining their points…Sometimes the syndicalists would caucus a line and then put it forward as policy…Some leaders were embarrassed by being fed a line…He (Xulu) felt this, his wisdom and intelligence undermined. He’d make suggestions. They were not taken. Syndicalists would undermine a decision taken in meetings.”[53] It is in this context Maseremule believes that Max made a sudden accusation that Fanaroff was a state informer, an accusation that centred around head office's decision to permit Moses Mayekiso to return from England despite knowing that he would be arrested by the security police.[54] Bernie and other head office members argued that as a worker leader he must return and confront `the struggle` and the union must campaign for his release, “It was not politically correct to choose the cowardly route” recalls Maseremule.[55] Xulu blamed Fanaroff for Mayekiso’s arrest and Fanaroff angrily countered that Xulu was the informer because he returned with Mayekiso but was not arrested. Xulu was stung by these accusations and he was also aware, before the ANC information was released, that he had offended people. Thus in this complex interplay of internal power and racial dynamics, Maseremule dismisses Xulu’s allegation that a `white intellectual` had plotted his downfall` as being highly personal, and skewed in nature. He believes Xulu probably was an informer.[56]

Erwin imputes Xulu’s motives to an obsessive hatred of the ANC,

> Maxwell is a tragic case where there is something in his personal life that caused him to have a deep and abiding hatred of the ANC so his espionage was in relation to the ANC...
>
> He was always very cautious on ANC links, but since there were many leaders who were quite cautious, and used to evaluate ANC links very, very carefully, he was not decisive. The evaluation of ANC contacts was done very carefully not because of a political hostility, we only discovered Max’s deep-seated political hostility later, but in the rest of the leadership it was a scepticism about their operational capacity, and that it was dangerous to link with the ANC because it would undermine the union’s operations.
>
> We have documents where Xulu reported back to his handlers, and it`s fascinating, and nuances where he would talk about things that had been said in the leadership of the union whether it was Bernie, myself, Moss or Joe Foster, and turn it to reflect more anti-ANC sentiments than was actually the case. This is one of the problems of running spies where they sometimes report more of their views than they report what is actually happening.[57]

Perhaps however in seeking a motive we need to look at the motives of other parties and the political stakes involved at this point. It is possible that the state accessed documents and then through its informer networks fed this information into ANC intelligence networks. The state after all had an interest in smearing liberation forces that had overtly socialist leanings and which

counterposed the more pro-capitalist sympathies in the ANC. There were certainly interests too, in Numsa, who would not have lamented Xulu's downfall as the pro-ANC Border region's comment reflected and his hardline socialist position certainly clashed with the views of certain intellectuals in the union. In the interests of unity, people such as Xulu, who were advocating a Workers Party were a direct threat to the ANC/Cosatu alliance. It is perhaps unlikely that anyone, or group within the union, directly conspired to effect his downfall but, as has previously been recorded, there were powerfully opposed lobbies in Numsa and certain groupings may have had an interest in ensuring that a thoroughgoing investigation was not implemented. The ANC too, would have had its motives and the information did after all emanate from its intelligence networks. Xulu had alienated elements within the ANC and SACP and his call for the formation of an independent Workers Party was clearly not in the ANC's interest especially when advanced by a powerful voice with considerable worker support.[58] Powerful interests were at stake and also, as previously explored, strong imperatives to demonstrate unity existed. As a former member of the Numsa executive recalls, "Fighting between Inkatha and the ANC and the demand for unity."[59] Xulu's downfall is an interesting pointer to the political tensions and contested terrain at the time and the range of powerful political interests that were at play. If the ANC was in any way responsible it would indicate a large insecurity around its hegemony in the political terrain in the face of its powerful labour ally which still, in pockets, advanced a strong democratic socialist position. The socialist/capitalist route was not yet a foregone conclusion amongst liberation forces although it would not be long before the ANC's hegemonic capitalist viewpoint predominated. The incident also illustrates that the union was not always as fair in its grievance and disciplinary proceedings as it demanded of managements, nor was the debate in the union always as transparent as some comrades thought, or would have it.[60]

The Alliance: A complex proposition

Despite Dlamini's upbeat comments concerning the alliance, in reality relationships proved more difficult to conduct, both on a practical and ideological level. The `two hats` debate reflected some of the practical difficulties that the alliance engendered. Allegiance to two or more organisations in the alliance inevitably meant that leadership was distracted from union tasks. Confusion also arose around which organisation and position the individual was representing when attending meetings where alliance partners were present. Mayekiso, who was also president of the Civic Association of the Southern Transvaal, made a strong argument for accepting dual leadership to enable Cosatu unionists with their organising experience to build and lead political organisations.[61] He argued that, "We want the ANC to be biased towards the poor, the workers… This is very important for reshaping the society…You need to be inside where policies and ideas are shaped. If you are forced to resign from the union you will lose touch and no longer have a base to influence you."[62] Essentially, the union had adopted this position at its 1991 National Congress when it resolved that, "The standard of work and discipline demanded of Numsa staff and office bearers will apply

irrespective of any political involvement by such persons. Exceptions to this can only be made by an REC or NEC. When carrying out work of Numsa or representing Numsa, both staff and office bearers are expected to work within the mandate of Numsa policy and practices."[63] A focus on the servicing of membership suffered, however, and the union was ultimately not able to halt the large scale exodus of officials who were the focus of their dual membership resolution. On the ANC's assumption to power many left the union to assume political positions. In addition, contrary to Dlamini's assurances concerning `domination`, tensions began to emerge when alliance partners expressed differences and Cosatu complained of the lack of consultation and transparency that the ANC and SACP revealed in their everyday conduct accustomed as they were to working clandestinely. In Numsa an unease soon developed around the alliance. This of course reflected the diverse tendencies that were present in the union. As previously mentioned, officials and shopstewards belonged to a variety of political organisations and persuasions such as the ANC, Wosa, the Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT), the New Unity Movement, Inkatha, Azapo and the PAC. This meant there were differences of opinion on how Cosatu should behave in the alliance. Some, for example, believed that Cosatu should follow the ANC and SACP's lead at a political level, and did not require independent representation in political negotiations. Others felt that Cosatu should assert its independence in the alliance and participate in political negotiations as an autonomous force.[64] On a more general level the old uncertainty about the ANC's multi-class composition resurfaced. It was noted by certain tendencies within Numsa that the ANC's leadership was chiefly petit-bourgeois and that it was finding sympathy with big capitalists.[65] Thus a discomfort was expressed at being in an alliance with an ANC which was demonstrating a growing closeness with South African capital, including inevitably some of Numsa's large employers. Entry into the alliance also represented a shift away from the independent unions' position on unity which asserted that the solidarity of the working class could not be cemented in the context of support for one political organisation. It inevitably complicated any possibility of a merger with Nactu and its consequences for Natal have already been discussed. Nactu's Mewusa (Metal Electrical Workers Union), for example, withdrew from a merger with Numsa owing to its participation in the Tripartite Alliance.[66] *Workers Voice*, a Wosa publication, expressed it thus,

> The road taken by Cosatu leadership is not unknown territory. In several European countries there are different trade union federations, one for each major political party. This has never worked in the interests of the working class of those countries, and has only stood as a barrier to united class action...Either Cosatu remains an independent political force, free to defend the interests of the working class... Or Cosatu becomes the trade union wing of the ANC, bound to defend the decisions of the ANC and unable to defend working class interests unless the ANC agrees.[67]

For Cosatu and Numsa the concept of the working class taking political and economic control began to reveal itself as a much more complex proposition than it had formerly appeared.

3. Inserting a worker perspective

Introduction

Przeworski et al writing in 1995 on eastern and southern European and South America countries undergoing a transition from autocratic regimes to a democratic dispensation outline criteria that they believe are important in ensuring sustainable democracy. A socialist dispensation is not their point of departure although redistributive policies are. They reject the prevailing neo-liberal policies emanating from the United States and multi-national agencies suggesting that, "The ideology is based on a belief about the virtues of markets and private ownership that is not justifiable... it values efficiency over distribution to the extent of justifying social horror. It places economic considerations over political ones, willing to sacrifice other economic and political values at the altar of efficiency."[68] They assert that the principle error in neoliberalism is that it minimises the importance of the state. They thus reassert the importance of a strong state operating through viable state institutions. Such institutions are necessary to promote, "normatively desirable and politically desired objectives, such as freedom from arbitrary violence, material security, equality, or justice...".[69] State institutions, they believe, need to guarantee a cultural pluralism and an incorporation of all major political forces and that such participation must make a difference to the welfare of their constituencies. In this role institutions can play an important stabilising and liberalising role in the new society. They further argue that the state needs to ensure that the reform package is directed at stimulating economic growth and that such growth should occur in the context of a reformed market economy as competitive markets are important in the achievement of efficient and robust economies. They point out however that many transitions inherit an economic crisis and thus the consolidation of institutions has to occur in a context of deteriorating material conditions which inevitably places them under strain. Thus, they contend, it is necessary for the state to create a social protection net which accompanies economic reforms in order to cushion people from the most dire consequences of the reform strategy.[70] Although they are writing after Numsa and Cosatu's attempts at implementing a radical reform package in 1993 for a pre- and post transition South Africa it is interesting to note how much of Numsa's programme coincided with the conclusions of these 21 academics from 10 countries who collaborated in reaching such proposals over a two year period.

As previously explored, despite its socialist rhetoric Numsa's reform programmes were premised on the creation of a mixed economy which incorporated both capitalist and socialist-type redistributive elements. Przeworski et al, guarding against overgeneralisations, speak of the great variations that could occur within the context of the proposals they set out, but pivotal similarities with Numsa's thinking can also be discerned. The one major difference however is the importance that Numsa gave to the role of civil society in participating in reconstructing society. In particular it emphasises the role of the working class and the trade unions in restructuring the economy in

order to create a stable new democracy. Although Przeworski et al emphasise the differences that will manifest in each emerging democracy they see trade unions in general in developing countries as being too weak and decentralised to operate as co-determinist partners.[71]

Przeworski et al argue that, "A central task of new democracies...is to create the channels and the incentives for all the major political forces to process their interests within the framework of representative institutions. If decisions are made elsewhere, representative institutions wilt."[72] It was to the creation of such institutions that Numsa turned its attention in the belief that they would constitute the backbone of a new democracy. As previously discussed, Numsa's concept of `radical reform` took the shape of tri- or multi-party discussions and negotiations in a range of different forums. This was a road that it had tentatively begun to travel along many years before during the pension's crisis of 1981. Such institutions typically involved the ANC, the state, capital, and other political and civic organisations in different combinations. Through such an approach Numsa hoped to shape macroeconomic policy. The pragmatic `syndicalists` were the main advocates of this path within Numsa and Cosatu. The crucial element in their approach was `negotiation` which was viewed not as an admission of weakness but as a source of strength resting on the power that the unions had built over the previous decade. It entailed the restructuring of existing, and the creation of new, institutions which could augment workers' power through the ability to influence economic and political policy and decision-making processes. Its aim was to deepen democratic processes in a future South Africa which it believed could not be adequately served through a five yearly participation in national elections. This was consistent with the form of gradualist socialism that Roemer describes when he talks of the goals of socialists as being more than the pursuance of economic egalitarianism. Their aims, he argues, also extend to the reformation of the nature of the state and political power which he specifies as "equality of opportunity for political influence."[73] Such socialists, Wright contends, aim to extend and deepen democratic governance to embrace political equality, but they also envision "new forms of political participation, communication and consensus formation" which capitalism in various ways thwarts. The goal is however "more than simply equal political influence but that it also involves the extension of democratic authority over the economy."[74] Numsa's conception of incremental radical reform embraced a comprehensive package which progressed from micro factory transformation through to a macroeconomic programme. Its three year bargaining programme, its industrial strategy, and its macroeconomic vision of growth through redistribution combined in an holistic platform which aimed to deliver increased control by the working class over the delivery of wealth, goods, and services. `Partnerships`, `stakeholders`, `corporate governance`, `co-determination` became the language of the day. The progress of the three year bargaining programme and industrial restructuring in Numsa's industries has already been analysed. In this chapter we scrutinise the political leg of its working class programme.

Up to this point Numsa had prevaricated in committing itself to a blueprint which would restrict its freedom of action. What had historically characterised Numsa's (and its predecessors') leadership approach was its flexibility. It had emerged from a highly adaptable, survivalist tradition which had been the source of its considerable creativity and innovation and which had constantly obliged people outside of the union in Cosatu and the labour movement more generally to re-appraise their approaches. Its manner of operating was fluid, contingent, sensitive to its membership and highly adaptable. A socialist programme would have committed it to a circumscribed position and this was anathema to the way it operated. Suddenly, however, this manner of operating became a threat. If the union did not commit itself and Cosatu to a binding programme which it must persuade the ANC to adopt, labour would be marginalised in the new political dispensation that it had so long envisaged. It urgently needed to insert a working class perspective into the new national democratic state which was becoming an inevitability. Time was running out in which to exert power and influence and its experience in the alliance forcibly brought this home. It was now that the union turned its attention to the production of a working class programme which would embrace both a political and economic blueprint which would favour the working class. It was encapsulated in what became known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The section below examines how the union belatedly turned its attention to both developing and promoting such a Programme and its success, or lack of success, in so doing.

Shaping economic reform

In the political arena the union turned its attention to the restructuring or creation of pivotal national institutions. These most centrally concerned participation in macro economic, labour rights, and constitutional forums.[75] In September 1990 business, labour and government signed the Laboria Minute which ended the LRA campaign. This was a turning point. It resulted in rapid changes in the labour law, and converted the National Manpower Commission (NMC) from a toothless government body to a tripartite negotiating forum which had the power to place potential legislation before parliament. It was in this forum that Cosatu first raised the need for a tri-partite economic forum, and here lay the genesis of what was to become the National Economic Forum (NEF). It was Numsa that first advocated the idea. John Gomomo, a Volkswagen shopsteward and Vice-president of Cosatu urged delegates in this direction at a Cosatu National Campaigns Conference in 1991, "We are moving from resistance to reconstruction. We need to move away from sloganising. We must make concrete proposals on worker rights and reconstructing the economy. We the organised working class, must determine the pace and direction of the political and economic developments in South Africa."[76] Such appeals were initially contentious. Some unionists argued that tri-partite negotiations would weaken and co-opt the union movement and that union leaders would be tempted to forge deals with employers and the state and thus diffuse worker militancy. John Gomomo disagreed, "This is always a danger in any negotiations, whether it is about wages, the LRA, childcare, or a recognition agreement. There is nothing special about

bargaining changes to the economy. But as unions we do not say `there is this danger, we will not negotiate`."[77] Schreiner nevertheless acknowledged the danger of leadership becoming progressively distanced from the union's base. "The one problem is that national agreements tend to be further away and more complex. That's why report-backs and mandates have to be stressed so that the rank and file can keep control over the process of negotiations."[78] The union argued that the labour movement in an economic forum was well positioned to represent broader working class concerns. Urgent matters such as job creation and a viable economic growth path could be usefully addressed here. Ultimately, as Maseremule commented, "The Cosatu leadership was convinced through the seriousness of Numsa's arguments. Jay (Naidoo, Cosatu GS) bought into it. No other union was arguing for a labour perspective in the transition."[79]

The concept of an economic forum was given impetus when the Nationalist government employing the limited transitional space available to it, embarked on a unilateral restructuring exercise. It reasserted its sole right to govern and this included the right to introduce new forms of taxation, to determine fuel prices, to sell off state assets, to reduce government spending on public services, to introduce new tariff policies, and to implement the national budget without consultation. The formerly isolationist government was preparing to re-enter world markets and to reintegrate itself with global capital. Labour's concerns were brushed aside. For Numsa, the launch of a tripartite economic forum was of great urgency if labour was to make an impact on the transition period and curtail Nationalist government economic initiatives. In this endeavour it was ironically supported by big business which was anxious to halt the downward economic spiral. The government however resisted such interference and continued to maintain its sovereign right to rule. Numsa and Cosatu for their part understood from their experience of the LRA campaign that government participation was essential if an economic forum was to wield any power.[80] In the manner that Przeworski has underscored, it had learnt that the state was an essential element in the forging and underscoring of critical national policies. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the role of the state in economic life, Numsa however had always believed that "...unions, working people, were central to change in South Africa."[81] Its policies thus emphasised the importance of working class organisation in co-determining future economic policy through the participation in join-decision making forums.

In October 1991 the government unilaterally introduced a new Value Added Tax (VAT) to replace the existing General Sales Tax (GST). Such a tax was particularly onerous to the working class as it was applied to a wide range of essential goods and services such as electricity, water, union subscriptions, medical services, rents, and basic foodstuffs. Cosatu's 1991 Congress took a resolution to act.[82] Consultations with a range of organisations resulted in a decision by Cosatu and Nactu to call a two day stayaway to demand the exemption of certain items from VAT (most importantly on fresh foods), for an end to unilateral restructuring by government, and for the

creation of a forum where future economic polices could be negotiated.[83] The action on the 4 November 1991 was the largest ever stayaway in South Africa and was observed by a massive 3.7 million workers, and involved 68 per cent of black workers (including most Numsa members.)[84] The VAT campaign created a powerful unity as workers across federations planned activities. Succumbing to pressure, the Minister of Finance, Barend du Plessis made certain concessions. He maintained the rate of taxation at 10 per cent but exempted basic foods such as milk products, mealie rice, mealies, pilchards, and fresh fruit and vegetables. He also removed VAT on electricity, water, union subscriptions, medical services, and rents.[85]

The most enduring gain however to come out of the campaign was the creation of the National Economic Forum (NEF) which, immediately after the stayaway, business agreed to establish. This was labour's attempt to compel business to recognise the importance of labour's contribution to a future South African economy as well as to ensure that proper attention was focussed on the health of the post-apartheid economy. Friedman et al have commented on the unusual amount of power that labour wielded at this point, "Business interest in a contract is ... evidence of a degree of union influence rare in democratic transitions."[86] It took until June 1992 however, including a change in finance minister, to lure government into the forum. Friedman et al see the `prime dynamic` behind the creation of the NEF as "a union desire to force the government, not only in labour's interest but those of the broader national liberation movement to share decisions during the transition and the government's concern to resist that."[87] This was indeed one stated aim but there was more to the NEF. Numsa and Cosatu's intention was to bind not only the Nationalist government into agreements but also a future ANC government into an arrangement in which labour was a central stakeholder. The unions hoped that even if the Tripartite Alliance were to fragment in the future, the NEF would provide some guarantee that the interests of labour would not be overlooked, even if the ANC, like the Nationalists, resisted labour's interference in matters of governance. Now, through their participation in the NEF labour, for the first time had gained the institutional power to participate in important decisions on the economy, and by being the instigator of such a forum had also gained the right to shape the nature of the institution.

Friedman et al have cogently argued that in the pre-election period labour's participation in bi- and tri-partite national forums delivered little to its constituency although it achieved some limited gains. On the NEF Cosatu managed to block unilateral government decisions and to establish labour as a party to be consulted in major policy processes. It had also, through its considerable insight into the problems that beset the economy, been able to force different parties to focus on possible solutions.[88] As Godongwana commented, "The capitalists used to say `you lead us in terms of ideas.` We [Numsa] put the ideas on the table."[89] Some argue too that Cosatu's approach assisted the political negotiations process by creating a climate of accommodation between opposing forces in its co-determinist attempts to find points of consensus on which to build.[90] In

other areas however it failed. Its macro economic agenda, for example, which included a commitment to industrial restructuring favourable to labour, and a moratorium on retrenchments and policies which would create sustainable jobs, failed. Its success in establishing the right to a say in trade policy and in gaining agreement on a revised offer to GATT entailed tariff compromises which involved further job loss. Other areas too, such as an agreement on the parameters for public works programmes, in no way extended labour's control over the state or employer's terrain of governance. There were also cases where negotiations worked against Cosatu's interests such as when it agreed on the NMC that the right to strike and employers' right to lock out should be inserted into an interim constitution, which resulted in the agreement being incorporated into the new Bill of Rights against Cosatu's wishes. There were structural problems besides. Labour had insisted on the necessity for such a forum and was thus obliged to work harder than the other forum partners to drive its agenda which centrally concerned the distribution of wealth. It was also hamstrung by a lack of knowledge and research capacity to engage in technical issues and was thus at times out-bargained. When it entered such forums it aimed to speak on behalf of a broad working class constituency, especially the unemployed, who had little power to champion its interests. It soon became apparent however that it lacked capacity adequately to represent its own constituency let alone impoverished constituencies beyond its membership. It had also mistakenly believed that such negotiations would quickly deliver results which when this did not materialise alienated its members from these processes.[91]

Cosatu excluded its political partner the ANC from NEF discussions and negotiations. By its non-inclusion Cosatu both acknowledged government's sensitivity to the ANC's participation and signalled to its alliance partners that it was in a position to shape a future economic programme and was confident and ready to do so. This was probably a mistake. The ANC greatly resented its exclusion and in the post election period it soon became apparent that it was resisting union participation in economic policy making. By this time it possessed a huge popular mandate to govern and no longer believed it needed to consult its resourceful but demanding labour partner. For business too an alliance with a moderate government concerned to mollify capital was considerably easier than complicated negotiations with labour.[92] Thus both the ANC and Cosatu lost the opportunity to boost labour as a major civil society partner which ultimately could only have strengthened the new democracy. Instead an insecure ANC embarked on a process of disempowering labour in the governance process. By the time the NEF and NMC dissolved to form Nedlac (National Economic Development and Labour Council) in 1995 Cosatu had achieved little of what it set out to win. Labour had succeeded in inserting itself into economic policy making processes but this was a precarious power as its existence was dependent on the new government permitting agreements from this forum to influence government policy- making and legislation. Yet it has to be said that Cosatu *did* succeed in inserting labour's voice into the discussion of national economic policy-making, but as will become clear in the following section

its political influence was severely circumscribed beyond its participation as a junior partner in the Tripartite Alliance.

In the arena of political negotiations Cosatu was to have little impact although Numsa via Cosatu was to have influence over the processes. The demand for an elected constituent assembly, for example, initially emanated from Numsa in a 1989 Congress resolution which stated that, "...the framing of a democratic Constitution must be the responsibility of the people as a whole through an elected Constituent Assembly. The process leading to a Constituent Assembly should be characterised by free political activity and access to the media."[93] Later, the Tripartite Alliance adopted a similar demand. Workers in Numsa were divided on whether Cosatu should participate independently in political negotiations, or whether it should take part as a member of the Tripartite Alliance. By the beginning of negotiations in 1991, Cosatu had decided to participate independently. Such aspirations were however rapidly shattered. In the `talks about talks` a decision was made that political parties alone would participate in Codesa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa). Cosatu was granted seats in the ANC and SACP delegations and participated in obtaining mandates from its membership via the Tripartite Alliance Forum. Its role ultimately though was relegated to one of mobilising its membership in order to apply pressure on parties when negotiations deadlocked.[94] In a tactic familiar to unionists it combined negotiations with militant pressure. This continuous pressure exerted by workers ensured that parties reconvened. After the breakdown of Codesa 2 negotiations, for example, which following the Nationalist Party's refusal to concede to majority rule and an elected Constituent Assembly and the massacre of 45 people at Boipatong in police-assisted Inkatha violence in 1992, Cosatu initiated a campaign of `rolling mass action`. More people participated in the action than had ever been recorded in the country's history. About four million workers participated in the 2 day stayaway between the 2-3 August 1992. In Cape Town, African workers stayed away from work en masse although only 25 percent of coloured workers were absent. In Port Elizabeth 90 per cent of African and coloured workers stayed away and support in Natal was surprisingly high considering Inkatha's refusal to support the action.[95] By November 1993 agreement on an interim government and an elected Constituent Assembly had been forged and by December 1993 an interim constitution was in place and democratic elections scheduled for 27 April 1994.

Influencing political policy: Reconstruction Accord

From the point of the ANC's unbanning in 1990, Numsa and Cosatu acknowledged the hegemony of the ANC in the political arena. As political negotiations advanced and the possibility of the ANC seizing political power became almost a certainty, the union turned its attention to how it could harness the new government's programme to the primary needs of the working class. It was in Numsa that the way forward was born. Maseremule recalls that, "No other union was doing this."[96] If the NEF was a pact primarily to compel business to commit to economic reform and for

both the state and business to recognise labour as an equal partner in economic matters, the Reconstruction Accord was Numsa and Cosatu's attempt to tie the ANC down to redistributary political and economic reforms.

As previously explored, Numsa's RDGs in 1989 had forged contact with the Australian labour movement and had explored concepts of `strategic unionism`. These contacts had acquainted the union with the prevailing pact or social contract signed between Australian trade unions and the ruling Australian Labour Party. In the labour context the traditional pact between government and capital involved labour conceding industrial stability and increased productivity in return for a commitment from capital to restrain rising prices and for government to expand social expenditure on public goods and services.[97] A social contract is a form of corporatism, in Crouch's definition, whereby parties seek points of co-operation where all might gain which thus differentiates it from simple bargaining where compromise is inevitable. It relies firstly on the belief that government cannot ignore a large group who is involved in, and is making decisions, about the economy and secondly on the premise that a democratic government would be concerned to pursue policies such as full employment which are also in workers' interests.[98] In the Australian case the contract involved a commitment by government to increase the social wage in exchange for the acceptance of a lower industry wage. Thus the idea was born in Numsa of a pact between Cosatu and ANC whereby the latter would commit to a post election process of fundamental reform based primarily on the needs of the working class for which Cosatu in return would deliver workers' support in an election. The concept of a social contract, linked as it was to Numsa's radical reform package sparked intense debate in Numsa specifically on what the nature of such a pact entailed for its independence and the pursuit of socialism. The debate centred on the question of whether it was a means of outsmarting capital or whether it was creating space for capital to make further inroads. In the game of power how much did you give in order to receive back more fulsomely.

Some saw the debate, and Numsa's continued assertion of an independent socialist position, as almost meaningless rhetoric when confronted with the stark economic and political realities of the 1990s. Chris Lloyd, for example, believed that Numsa's leadership was not being honest with its membership on the nature of the political landscape and the trade-offs it was entertaining,

> A social democracy based on a market economy, and things like rapid tariff reduction programmes and privatisations were likely, just simply for the economy to fit into a world market. We were heading into a period where social democracy was far more likely than socialism. We're in a permanent state of social democracy. It`s not a transitional phase, this is what the society is going to be like. Yet all the rhetoric of the union was geared towards militant socialism. The vision was still of equality, complete equality.[99]

In reality Erwin's vision was less socialist than in Lloyd's description. He envisaged a mixed economy which entailed the continuance of a capitalist economy coupled with a measure of state intervention and planning. Maseremule believed Erwin had long given up on a socialist vision, "I

never bought Alec's two stage revolutionary theory. He was borrowing ideas from the heart of social democratic Australia."[100] In fact, as Erwin honestly acknowledged, the welfarist social democratic option was not a possibility as the South African state simply did not possess sufficient finances. There would be little cushioning for the poverty stricken in the transitional state. Only a restructured and planned economy, he believed, would deliver, and this was not a socialist restructuring in the sense of seizing control of the means of production.[101] Lloyd held that union leadership was not envisaging changes to the basic capitalist formula. Private ownership, the right to profit, the right of the owner to manage and to control investments would all remain in tact. Thus he concluded the only way to curb capital's excesses in the new society was through the union's bargaining strength. Numsa's main task was to bargain hard for its members and `to forget the revolutionary struggle of the working class`.[102]

Hartford too was of the opinion that influential leadership was misleading workers on the nature of the trade-offs although his sympathies, unlike Lloyd's, lent towards the union's active involvement in the creation of a socialist future,

> Nobody said when we adopted the three year bargaining strategy that this is about making capitalism more competitive, surviving in the global order ... it's about survival and productivity - nobody said that. Workers thought this was all taking us to socialism. Yes, Alec would warn about tariffs coming down and so on, and give good information. But nobody was comrade enough to say `take the red flag down, this is not about socialism this is about saving our country under capitalism.`[103]

A number of influential leadership figures in Numsa and the labour movement agreed with this view and saw tri-partite agreements, social contracts, and co-determinist agreements as another means of boosting, and reforming capitalism. Others however viewed Numsa's strategy as a means of wresting more material wealth and more control from capital in an hostile environment to labour. Schreiner argued, for example, that at certain points, for tactical reasons, it was important to come to some kind of accommodation with the state and capital.[104] Godongwana, at the time Numsa Border Regional Secretary, agreed. He contended that the union was adopting a pragmatic route to the long-term vision of socialism. He believed that socialist critics, employing sophisticated Marxist rhetoric, too often rejected tactical ruses such as social contracts, but did not provide alternatives to burning questions confronting the working class. He argued, "What do we tell the 9 000 workers in the tyre manufacturing industry when tariffs are removed and their jobs are at stake? Do we tell them to wait for a socialist revolution? When the jobs of the workers are threatened, when the bosses increase their prices thus attacking the living standard of the workers etc, we should respond by putting demands to capital and, if need be, to the state."[105] He agreed with Lloyd's pragmatic defence of working people through hard bargaining and admitted that the union was currently aiming at reforming capitalism, `the immediate post-apartheid society will not be a socialist one.`[106] Yet unlike Lloyd he believed in the importance of sustaining an independent socialist vision and argued that the union must enter tri-partite forums with a socialist programme

in mind. He saw the forging of a social contract, for example, not as an end in itself, but as a building block to further advance socialism. Critically this meant that negotiations must operate in the context of careful mandates and report-backs. Demands needed to be transparent and accessible to workers especially if mass action in support of such demands may be necessary.[107]

Ultimately it was the pragmatists who won the day and a programme of advocating a social contract was pursued. Phil Bokaba, a shopsteward at ATC in Brits and Second Vice-President of Numsa, recalls the birth of the concept of a reconstruction accord in Numsa,

> We said, as Numsa, we need to support a political party that will look after workers and deliver on the following issues and it started then. Alec, Bernie and others were on a commission tasked to draw up a discussion document which we then were calling the Reconstruction Accord. We wanted that Accord to be signed before we go to elections, by the party that said `We will deliver this, if you vote for us`. Everyone knew this was the ANC. We debated and debated and we had more than eight drafts.[108]

Thereafter Numsa introduced the idea of the Reconstruction Accord to Cosatu where according to Gotz, the federation "welcomed the idea with open arms".[109] Bokaba recalls otherwise,

> At the first Cosatu Exco when this was introduced it was not well received by most affiliates and the national OBs [office bearers] of Cosatu were not convinced in the beginning. People had not thought about this. People said, `Ah, these workerists, what do they want now? We already have the Freedom Charter`. They just saw this thick book.
>
> After a few meetings people started to understand that you do just like in America `vote for me and I will deliver 1, 2, 3' and that you need something to campaign with. I remember Jay [Naidoo, Cosatu GS] saying at one meeting, `Originally I was not enticed by this RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme as it was later called], but now as we begin to talk I see there is something in what you say.` He read it and supported it, and when the GS [general secretary] speaks people listen! People were saying, `You can't tie down the ANC, they are from exile...` But finally they agreed but it was a helluva [huge] battle.[110]

Bokaba refers here to delegates questioning the adoption of an RDP when Cosatu had already adopted the Freedom Charter. Yet it is interesting to note that neither the ANC or Cosatu embraced the Freedom Charter as a blueprint for future governance although many of the RDP's tenets were founded on this document. This was in part due to the generalised nature of the Freedom Charter's demands which required elaboration into a more implementable form as well as the vagueness of the economic and political systems underpinning such demands. Mayekiso explained, "... workers were saying you can accept this (the Freedom Charter) as ... a basis for a policy to govern the country . Like `The land should be divided to those who work on it` but now this needed to be fleshed out to say what do you mean by that. These were principles the union said that have to be developed to say how do you do that."[111] Maseremule also believes that the ANC wished to distance itself from some of the Charter's overly radical demands, "The ANC was unsure of what platform to rally people around. The Freedom Charter was no good. It looked too radical with its ideas like the nationalisation of the heights of the economy. So it was never promoted."[112] The

content of the RDP which originated in Numsa and which was ultimately embraced by Cosatu rested on the economic concept of growth through redistribution. It was linked to Numsa's collective bargaining concepts which included the restructuring of workplaces and industries and broader social gains for workers such as training, housing, the use of pension/provident investments, and health schemes. The RDP took as its point of departure the premise that apartheid policies had caused huge economic and social dislocation which had to be repaired and reconstructed. Political change in South Africa would assume meaning only if real change materialised in ordinary people's lives. In order to achieve this, state finances and resources had to be directed at improving the lives of apartheid's disadvantaged. It essentially rested on five pillars: job creation, education and training, improved living conditions, rights, and a democratic political solution.[113]

In the domain of job creation the RDP advocated short and long-term job creation strategies. In the short- term government funded public works programmes should be directed at improving services in townships whilst simultaneously providing jobs and training to local people. In the longer term pivotal industries needed to be restructured to create sustainable jobs. Industrial output should be directed at the production of affordable and useful goods for people buying in the local market as well as to the development of lucrative international markets which would rectify the balance of payments deficit. Its education and training tenets rested on Numsa's carefully constructed integrated package of demands to employers. It aimed to upgrade the provision of education to include universal access through the provision of literacy training, and restructured industrial training models which would provide people with access to adult education, formal education and job training. Workers' level of skill would be linked to grades and pay. In the terrain of improved living conditions the RDP advocated the responsibility of the state to provide for people's basic needs in the arena of healthy water, electricity, education, housing, and health care. It also espoused the promotion of basic human rights which would include the freedom to organise, and the freedom of the press to maintain an open and accountable government. Workers' rights included the freedom to form, join, and control trade unions and the freedom to bargain, and to take action in support of demands. The procedural detail that should accompany worker rights would be detailed in a new Labour Relations Act which would be negotiated through an institution such as the NEF. In the sphere of democratic governance it promoted democratic non-racial elections followed by the implementation of the tenets of the RDP.[114]

Numsa's battle to secure Cosatu's adoption of the Reconstruction Accord was a mere forerunner to Cosatu's struggle to persuade the ANC seriously to consider the tenets underpinning the document and to adopt it as its election platform. This was a battle that it won under severely circumscribed and compromised circumstances. Gotz charts what was not fully apparent to Cosatu workers at the time, namely that, "...The story of the ANC's contribution to the RDP is the story of Cosatu's progressive loss of control over its conceptualising process, and an attendant loss of focus in its content."[115] Cosatu viewed the Accord in a multifaceted manner. It was a `contract` between government and labour, an ANC election manifesto to be implemented after elections, and a popular campaign which would assist in binding the ANC to its election promises. In the pursuit of this goal it naively disregarded the possibility that the ANC would impose its own conceptions on the draft programme and utilise it for its own purposes. The document's first formal presentation at the ANC's February 1993 NEC where it was adopted, was not auspicious. Gotz believes it was adopted chiefly as a means of placating radical elements in the ANC who were averse to the concept of a government of national unity (which included minority party representation) which the ANC was promoting in an attempt to break the deadlock in political negotiations. The programme was adopted with little discussion or understanding of its purpose or of the interconnected nature of its social, political and economic precepts.[116] What was clear in the

adoption of the document was that the ANC had little interest in becoming party to a binding accord. It simply assumed Cosatu's electoral support. The union, and Cosatu however continued to promote the reconstruction concepts underpinning the Accord. Recalls Bokaba,

> Then the other battle was with the ANC and because of that battle we dropped the idea of having an accord, and that's why it was changed to the Reconstruction and Development Programme. This was no longer a signed, binding contract. We lost that battle...Then the ANC said `this is a discussion document ' so that was when we had further drafts - first, second, third , fourth drafts - I can't remember how many. And finally they said, `OK this is the platform`, and they called it a `platform`. We refused to give up on it - even in the ANC NEC first meetings - not everyone was convinced." [117]

Little had left-wing socialist critics in Numsa realised that the concept of a social contract was to appear as far too radical for the ANC to take seriously. The new government did not wish to be burdened by any promises of far-reaching redistribution of wealth.

After the NEC's adoption of the document, the ANC departments which were rapidly attempting to assemble governance policies seized the opportunity to make their imprint. It was here that it was renamed the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and all traces of an accord disappeared. In the process, the document was rendered into a diluted and almost meaningless wish list. The socialist intentions and wealth distributive elements were replaced with capitalist monetarist concepts and a concomitant downgrading of worker's rights. Cosatu in early drafts was confronted with the exclusion of the section on rights which exhibited a strong labour focus. Its tight integrated package of education/skills training linked to grades and pay had been unpacked to encompass everything from youth development to the empowerment of women. Clauses calling for fiscal restraint and cautioning that government resources would be redirected `within existing constraints... coherent, strict and effective monetary policies will be the cornerstone of our RDP' had also crept into the economic sections.[118]

Numsa's fourth Congress in July 1993 revealed a union which was grappling to come to terms with a potential and actual loss of power, political influence, and the realisation that its socialist policies were not likely to be implemented. It demonstrated a contradictory support, and an ambivalence, around its relationship with the ANC and its policies. It alone amongst Cosatu affiliates reasserted a strong socialist position in the latter days of apartheid and demonstrated an independence from both the official Cosatu Tri-partite position and from the ANC. This engendered a resurgence of a radical politics which resulted in robust and lengthy debate. In characteristic manner the union decided to open the entire Congress to the media (usually the press was invited for opening speeches) to demonstrate, as Mayekiso expressed it that, "Numsa is a very strong supporter of freedom of expression and the freedom of the press."[119] Mayekiso also remarked on the high levels of participation and the sophistication of debate, "The debates were robust, reflective of an active membership in a democratic union. All manner of issues were

discussed and those that were `hot` ended in votes. The general secretary's report was also debated and amended."[120]

The union's participation in the development of a reconstruction accord for implementation in a post apartheid South Africa had raised the issue of ownership in a future South Africa. Thus it debated its position on the question of land distribution, and nationalisation of the `of leading heights of the economy`[121] These demands were not new. Both the Freedom Charter and previous Numsa resolutions advocated the return of the land and other resources to the people. What was new however was that after three hours of debate and a vote, the resolution agreed to nationalisation `without compensation`.[122] It was hotly contested with a number of regions raising such objections as, `It's nice to say these things, but where they are possible we don't know. We need to be practical, scientific and strategic… We agreed in 1991 that there is the need for some nationalisation. To discuss compensation is premature… We may be in the position to make these decisions when we have power, but to take this position now will only make getting power more difficult."(Border); "…there is not point in putting forward empty statements. To be safe let's remain silent…We must be careful not to commit ourselves to something we do not understand…We will make a mockery of ourselves calling for no compensation. We need resolutions that we are going to be able to defend." (Eastern Cape); and "Perhaps we should play with words and say `nationalisation with or without compensation and continue to discuss the issue in our ranks"(Northern Transvaal). It was the larger Wits regions however which argued for nationalisation without compensation, "There is no point in rewarding people who have robbed us in broad daylight" (Wits Central West); "In 1991 we were silent…Numsa proposes solving the housing problem within the next 10 years. We are saying this will not be possible without nationalising cement, bricks etc" (Wits Central West); and "Nationalisation is not a punishment, it's a necessity to address imbalances caused by apartheid…We have no money – how can we compensate?" (Wits East). Ultimately 455 voted in favour of nationalisation without compensation and 312 against.[123]

In characteristic manner the union strongly asserted the need for independence from the new government. This of necessity, it believed, entailed the building of a new community of the left in a post election South Africa. It continued to express an unease with the ANC's multi-class composition and thus argued for the need for the working class to develop an independent programme on how to advance to a socialist society. It called for a `conference on socialism` and a `conference of civil society` in order to reappraise the political landscape. As Mayekiso expressed it, "The dramatic events of the fall of `actually existing socialism` in Eastern Europe needs to be soberly looked at by the left in the country."[124] Thus the Congress resolved to ` look at new forms of organisation that will unify working class organisations, and parties that will take forward a programme to implement socialism. This could take the form of a Working Class Party`.[125] A

number of delegates were SACP members who felt that the Party should organise a conference on socialism especially as it had become increasingly evident that the organisation had no clear platform. The left was defined as `those organisations with a commitment to controlling the means of production by the working class for the benefit of society as a whole; democracy, internationalism, anti imperialism, non racialism`[126] The idea was not to exclude the ANC, but to allow the socialists in its ranks to `reappraise the strategic meaning of the Alliance ... and to relate it to the strategic goal of socialism`.[127] Delegates also wanted to ensure that a movement of the left would be available to ensure the implementation of the RDP.

Related to this, was a hotly debated resolution on the alliance, stating that `once the government of national unity is established, and the ANC is part of it, we should not have a formal alliance with the ANC... the unions should deal with the ANC as part of the government of the day through engagement forums such as NMC, NEF etc`. The union was concerned that Cosatu should not become `a transmission belt`[128] for ANC policies. Bokaba recalls that,

> People were feeling frustrated in provincial and local level in the alliance structures where people are not consulted. The ANC would come and say `Cosatu's not going to tell us what to do...` So then people started to think about an alternative to safeguard the interests of the working class, because our final objective is still for socialism and the ANC we know is an omnibus where every Tom, Dick, and Harry rides - even Anton Rupert is an ANC member.[129]

The union was continuing to demonstrate its determination to safeguard its independence despite Cosatu's alliance with the ANC in the transition period. As Mayekiso commented, "Numsa never stopped to put worker issues first as its primary focus."[130] A 1991 Congress resolution had stated,

> ... that the trade unions must remain independent of political parties. The development of party political groupings in Numsa will lead to party political dominations of the union and disunity among workers... Every Numsa member and official are free to belong to a political party of his or her choice. All Numsa members and officials are free to give any point of view in the debates which take place in the union. …The union will not allow members or officials to participate in debates as a bloc.[131]

Bokaba believed the tradition of permitting differing views would continue to safeguard Numsa's independent spirit in the future,

> We had an independence because we allowed different political persuasions into the union. Like about five years ago I knew of an affiliate who would not hire anybody who did not have an ANC background. Credentials, skills were not the criteria for deciding. They would ask `Which political party do you support' and then you'd say `PAC`, and that was the end of it. In Numsa your political affiliation doesn't matter. Once we were interviewing and an office bearer said `Which political party do you support?` and I was embarrassed and said `We are not going to hire people on their politics. We want a person that can do the job, and that job is to represent the interest of the workers, and if we take a decision that person must follow that decision.[132]

This political tolerance was however contained by a strong ethos of union discipline. Once a collective decision had been taken its members were expected to abide by it and to forego their

personal opinions. Thus organisational discipline prevented differences from threatening worker unity. Mbuyi Ngwenda recalls his experience,

> Numsa principles and policy in the end would always guide us and we are united on these. There were real tensions in discussions. People got angry. But what kept us together was if the union finally took a position no-one should speak against it. Finally there was a democratic collective decision. People were disciplined and bound by this. Take me as an example. I'm a person of the Alliance. But in 1993 Numsa took a decision against the Alliance. And when I went back to Eastern Cape I was called by the Alliance, and they wanted to know, `What is the rationale behind this` and they started labelling Numsa and saying it was a `workerist` organisation. And I told them they were missing the point because the fact that workers are raising questions about the Alliance manifests a problem. I had to justify and defend our resolution to say the Alliance must be dismantled. That is our tradition and practice.[133]

Following the Numsa Congress the union attempted to argue these positions at the Cosatu Special Congress in September 1993 but it stood alone and received no support. It was at this Congress that the fourth draft of the Reconstruction and Development Programme was presented. At the Congress Numsa and a number of affiliates protested at changes made to the document and insisted on the reinsertion of the section on rights and the deletion of references to `a lean state` whilst they inserted the concept of nationalisation as a strategic possibility for economic restructuring. The ideological thrust and coherence of the document was lost however.[134] On the 5th draft Cosatu commented that, "In the process of detailing the document, the concept of the Reconstruction and Development Programme is being lost. The links between the 5 original pillars is no longer clear and the role of a RDP in providing clear, coherent and integrated programmes which sets it apart from other party's programmes is lost."[135] Ultimately the final version emerged as a broad and vague document that could mean all things to all people.[136] Commented Von Holdt, "Any issue which might suggest a serious conflict with the rich and powerful has been smoothed over."[137] Still Cosatu leadership breathed a sigh of relief when Mandela mentioned the RDP in an election victory speech. Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki's aversion to the document was known, and senior ANC members had understandably reacted with irritation to those who sought to promote this vague document as a blueprint for governance.[138] For Cosatu and Numsa the battle to get the RDP adopted as the ANC's electoral platform had ultimately eclipsed what had happened to the content of the document in the process. The fact that its working class focus had been substantially diluted and that the document had ceased to cohere rendered it a blueprint for governance that in large measure predicted it being jettisoned. Furthermore it had long since become divorced from the rank and file as alliance partners tinkered with, and argued the merits of, the various clauses.

In a further attempt to bind the ANC to the RDP the Cosatu Special Congress took a resolution actively to campaign for an ANC victory and to release 20 of its top leaders to stand for election as ANC candidates. A number of these were Numsa leaders. Cosatu shopstewards and officials

emerged as a driving force behind the election campaign. Many employers, fearing the unknown and an ANC government, were uncooperative in ensuring their workforces were equipped to vote. Cosatu shopstewards and officials thus emerged as central in ensuring, regardless of union affiliation, that workers received voter education and that they were granted time off to apply for identity documents. Frequently shopstewards conducted voter education or arranged for education to take place.[139] By May Day 1994, an ANC victory was resoundingly clear. A plethora of Numsa officials left the union to take up positions in local, provincial and national government. Some of these were Alec Erwin who entered the national assembly and was appointed Deputy Minister of Finance, Mike Mabayakhulu, Sam Mthethwa (Numsa shopsteward and Cosatu Natal Regional chair), Willys Mchunu and Mike Mabayakhulu entered the Kwa Zulu/Natal provincial parliament; Maggie Magubane (Numsa's gender co-ordinator), Johannes Bokaba (Numsa's Northern Transvaal chair), Regina Dladla (an administrator) entered the Gauteng Parliament whilst Gloria Barry became an MEC for the Eastern Cape. Levy Mamabolo and David Modimoeng were successive mayors of Brits. Moses Mayeksio became a member of the national assembly whilst Joe Foster was appointed a senator.[140] Mayekiso commented at the time, "I was chosen by the working class - the unions and the civics… In the ANC there are many class interests. It is our duty to make sure the working class has a high priority. We must not be like other African countries where the trade union leaders forgot their constituency when they went to parliament. We must assist Cosatu and they must assist us."[141] Little thought was given however to how this individual relationship should operate beyond a loose accountability through the Tripartite Alliance.

Thus, in an unusual circumstance for an emerging democracy, the new government was supported by an uncommonly strong and centralised labour movement. Friedman et al have noted the willingness of many newly established democratic governments to engage labour in economic policy-making corporatist arrangements, but as Przeworski et al have pointed out trade unions have often been too weak or decentralised to take advantage of this opportunity. In South Africa however, the ANC as a government-in-waiting was not demonstrating a similar willingness, or at very least it was demonstrating a decided ambivalence. It was manifesting a strong inclination to exclude labour from policy-making despite labour's willingness to co-determine policy or engage in social contracts. Cosatu had the potential greatly to strengthen the new democracy's economic platform if coupled with the ANC's access to an improved research and technical capacity. Cosatu had the detailed knowledge of the economy through its experience of collective bargaining with capital. It had engaged in serious thinking and research in policy areas such as the future economy, housing, education, health, training and social benefits, much of which had emerged from Numsa's RDGs and the forums the union had initiated and in which the ANC often participated. Ultimately though Numsa's sophisticated, holistic and detailed plan elaborating a programme of political and economic transition to democracy was undermined by a lack of support from its political ally although this was not the only factor, as previously explored, that weakened its ability to

implement its reform programme in its entirety. Its failure to harness its membership's comprehension and hence support for such a programme was also severely to limit its possibilities for implementation. Furthermore it had prevaricated for so long around the production of a Working Class Political Programme that in the final analysis little time existed to engage in a propaganda campaign or as Gramsci would have put it in a `war of positions`.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored Numsa's attempts at attaining its political goal of building power to bring a democratic socialist society into being. This raises questions of whether it was successful in achieving this goal and whether it managed to insert a socialist perspective into the new democratic dispensation. Related to this is the question of whether Numsa in aligning itself politically in the pursuit of this goal compromised its independence and in so doing compromised its goals. This conclusion will firstly assess Numsa's success in achieving its socialist goals.

The historical events explored in this chapter demonstrate that Numsa was in the main not successful in inserting a socialist perspective into South Africa's transitional landscape. The end result was not as Turner had envisaged that, "The first essential for democracy is that the worker should have power at her/his place of work – that is, that the enterprise should be controlled by those who work in it."[142] Workers were nowhere near owning the means of production, or controlling investment decisions, or dictating how profits should be allocated. Yet there is no doubt that Numsa and the labour movement in general had made a huge contribution towards the birth of a non-racial democracy. Should this be described as a systemic shift? For many workers' who had argued for an alignment with the ANC in the full knowledge that it was not a socialist party, the ending of the apartheid state with all its associated human degradation and violence was regarded as the attainment of liberation and something to which they had undeniably aspired. As a Scaw shopsteward said: "The country was only liberated by the workers; they knew what they were fighting for."[143] The institutional fabric of apartheid had indeed been destroyed and the ANC's national democratic project had indisputably been the victor.

Yet in Marxist terms the deeper structure remained intact. The capitalism mode of production remained untouched and furthermore it was still constituted on the basis of racial divisions. This would seem to support Anderson and others' contention that unions "bargain within the society, but do not transform it." Nevertheless it would be too simplistic simply to assert this. The South African black working class had developed a high degree of political consciousness in its struggle which had directly contributed to a qualitative improvement in its daily life. It would be hard to deny that the end of institutional racism was transformative for the working class in as much as it no longer suffered the bureaucratic and brutal coercive measures that it experienced under the apartheid state. Simultaneously however many of the limitations to further improvements to

working people's lives remained. Von Holdt argues[144] against notions in radical literature (for example Burawoy) on workplace unionism that it is the contradiction between capital and labour in production that determines working class consciousness and political identity and working class potential for mobilising against capital and for socialism. He contends that working class politics is organised primarily at the level of the state and the contradictions that develop in such a way that the legitimacy of the state and the ruling bloc is weakened. This allows for the creation of a counter hegemonic struggle by a popular movement which further weakens the legitimacy and hegemony of the ruling bloc and state. He further argues that, "The interconnection of apartheid state, apartheid structuring of society, and apartheid workplace regime means that workplace struggle rapidly connected with counter-hegemonic struggle beyond the workplace."[145] I would contend that workers' political consciousness was raised by the experience of its contradictory position at the point of production and that they were radicalised in the process of both organising to resist the power of capital and of resisting the white man in the workplace. In Turner's words, "There is an intimate relationship between change in consciousness and organisation. Consciousness develops along with organisation."[146] The experience of confronting white capital and their frequent success in doing so lent workers the confidence to transfer such resistance outside of the workplace into the wider political sphere. This allowed them to contribute to, and take advantage of, the weakened legitimacy of the ruling bloc and to weaken it further. Thus I would view radical position's such as Burawoy's and that of Von Holdt's as being part of a continuum which, in South Africa's case, ultimately made a significant contribution to the ending of the apartheid state.

In the Numsa context however it needs to be asked if the destruction of apartheid was what workers had indubitably aspired to, was all the talk of socialism in the union merely rhetoric? It could be answered that some of it was. Yet the picture is more complex than this. Karl Marx's contention that men make history but not in the conditions they themselves choose is apt here. [147] The union had genuinely attempted to forge a socialist dispensation but a number of factors had militated against its achievement. These can be located within its own strategy but were also situated in factors beyond its control.

Firstly and inevitably the union had made mistakes. In the political arena it frequently did not employ its strengths with the same unerring instinct that it employed them in the bargaining and organisational spheres of the union. It strengths here were its strategic flexibility, it ability to convert a crisis into an opportunity, its appreciation that the organisational imperative provided the foundation of power, and its consultative, educative and democratic mode of operation. In the political arena however at the point where a strategic organisational imperative should have come into play, for example in the formulation of a socialist programme to guide and ground its politics, the union instead remained silent. Thus it lost the opportunity to reveal its political programme to

public scrutiny and to popularise it. This inability to commit itself in the political arena finally contributed to its inability to infuse its ideas into the society more generally. The ANC's Freedom Charter, although not ultimately the blueprint that the ANC adhered to, stood unqualified and uncontested.

Frequently in the early days too, what the union so successfully applied in the bargaining and organisational arena it did not apply to its politics. It strategic flexibility in the bargaining area, such as the decision for Mawu's to enter the Industrial Council, was not replicated in the political realm where a rigid abstentionism militated against its instinctive flexibility at a crucial time when political space was still available. Its commitment to worker democracy which it impressively adhered to in the bargaining arena was also not replicated in the political sphere, as the Mawu split demonstrated, and it thus lost the opportunity to allow for a more thoroughgoing political debate in the union. On the other hand its strong focus on democratic process and transparency in the organisational field (which marked its opposition to SACP politics) at times obscured the necessity to grapple with political content . Von Holdt, for example, remarks on how shopstewards at Highveld Steel strongly opposed township youth politics but that this was in effect opposition to its undemocratic style rather than the presentation of an alternative political programme to the UDF or ANC.[148] This of course, too, relates back to Numsa's lack of a socialist programme.

A crucial gap in the political arena was its neglect of what Gramsci termed `the war of position`, or in other words, the engagement in the ideological terrain which concerns itself with winning others in the society over to new positions and ideas. This meant Numsa was unable to realise the possibility of establishing a counter-hegemonic socialist position although it was successful in achieving this within the union itself, although not in Cosatu. This neglect was partly fuelled by its urban industrial perspective which precluded the organisation or education of the unemployed, rural, youth, and township community members. It was never able to persuade the working class more broadly that a socialist programme and the Freedom Charter were complimentary and thus the national liberation movement, the ANC could be drawn into such a project. Thus instead of an ideological sympathy developing between the labour movement and the ANC it was to find itself in the position where the hegemonic ANC was not responsive to Numsa or Cosatu's working class perspective. It appeared never to bring the same organisational attention to bear on its politics as it did to other spheres of union life and perhaps it is unrealistic to have expected that a besieged and under-capacitated union would have the ability to organise the political arena with the same focussed attention. Yet it certainly projected itself as having the right to make political interventions and believed in labour's right to spearhead the social movement of which it was a pivotal part, and Cosatu clearly, at critical moments, led this political opposition. It positioned itself in opposition to the SACP's bureaucratic centralism and the ANC's emphasis on a national democratic project yet it never seriously considered the creation of an alternative. It is clear that if

it had attempted to inculcate its ideas more widely it would have needed the support of a sympathetic party in the manner that Gramsci envisaged the role of a socialist party. Gramsci believed that the existing Italian Socialist Party (PSI) should be replaced in much the same way that Mawu intellectuals believed the SACP should be. The revolution, for Gramcsi, was made in the factory and the party existed to give political expression to the realisation of workers' control. It would operate in tandem with workers' organisation rather than dominate it. He foresaw a party that should be controlled from the bottom and whose main function would be to play an ideological role which involved guiding, educating, raising issues and providing `real leadership to the movement as a whole.`[149] His vision of the party was thus more restricted than that of the traditional Leninist vanguard party.[150] Numsa however remained at the level of reaction to the SACP's vanguardist bureaucratic centralism and never seriously posited an alternative. Yet it was clear that socialism in one union could never succeed without an overarching socialist formation to reach the society more broadly - the rural, the hostels, the unemployed, the youth and so on. I would thus concur with the position taken by Hyman that "trade unions themselves are centres or vehicles of opposition…the political configuration in the society can have a different complexion... when linked to radical parties ... The oppositional character of unionism can be translated into political action, providing a wider institutional base for dissent...while trade unionism may fall short of revolutionary consciousness, its character does shape consciousness in important ways, and there can be significant variations in its content ."[151] I would contend that Numsa had shaped workers' consciousness in important ways and that the possibility existed that if Numsa had been linked to a broader movement through a democratic socialist party it may have been able to inject a socialist perspective across a much broader sector of the society.

The union too was a victim of historical circumstances beyond its control which militated against its socialist project although the way it interacted with these circumstances was obviously significant as has been previously described.

The scale and ferocity of the civil war in Natal, for example, was beyond any prediction and the divisions thus fostered amongst the working class rendered a socialist alternative unviable and was to have the effect of drawing Numsa more closely into the ANC's hegemonic influence. Simultaneously the collapse of Eastern European communism, an unexpected event for most of the world, further militated against its socialist aspirations. The response to the event in the capitalist world was that communism had failed as an ideology and on the left disillusion, confusion, and in some cases the assertion that the left needed to re-formulate its approach, prevailed. Ironically it was the intellectuals in Mawu who had distanced themselves from the Eastern European style of communism (hence their alienation from the SACP) and had called for a more transparent, democratic and accountable socialism. Few however recalled its tenacious call to work towards an alternative form of socialism in a future South Africa. Instead the entire socialist project was

viewed with an even deeper suspicion by those in the liberation movement who had never embraced its tenets, and the position of those still advocating a socialist future was much weakened.

The question also needs to be asked whether Numsa in losing its battle for a socialist South Africa had also lost its independence and concomitantly if its loss of independence threatened its socialist politics? Mawu, Naawu and early Numsa had asserted a `party autonomous` position but this had changed when Cosatu formally allied itself with the ANC and SACP bringing Numsa into a `party-ancillary` position. Numsa (and Cosatu) had clearly, however, not fallen into the `state ancillary` position and had not become what it most feared - a `transmission belt` for the ruling party. More than any other union it was alarmed by this possibility as the resolutions from its July 1993 National Congress to break the alliance after the elections, and to hold a conference on socialism, testified. In Gramsci's system the loss of a union's independence could be viewed positively if it entailed an alignment with a worker accountable socialist party. But this was not the case in South Africa. The labour movement had in the main submitted to the national democratic perspective which in the end did not view itself as accountable to workers. The ANC did however express a commitment to raising the living standards of the poor (whilst not alienating wealthy capitalists) and it supported worker rights and legislative reform in the labour relations sphere as the interim constitution of 1993 had demonstrated.[152] The union too, despite its failures in a number of forums to assert its influence, had won the right to be consulted on the tripartite Nedlac formed in 1995. This institutional reform clearly fell into a form of gradualist socialism that Wright describes as being more than the pursuance of economic egalitarianism as it aims to extend and deepen democratic governance.[153] Entry into the tripartite forum allowed for the possibility that the labour movement would not to be marginalised either in political or economic policy arenas. This success, combined with the winning of certain pivotal rights such as the right to organise and the right to strike, permitted the labour movement the potential to continue organising towards a socialist future. Such institutional reform provided a platform for an independent leverage, voice, and influence from which to launch the second stage for the struggle for socialism for which a particular socialist tendency in Numsa had strongly argued. But it also allowed for the possibility of labour being marginalised and for these tripartite forums to serve the interests of the state or capital if important dissent was diverted and contained, thus preventing the employment of labour's ultimate weapon of the general strike.

ENDNOTES

[1] "Interview: Moses Mayekiso: general secretary of Numsa" *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol 14 No 2 June 1989.
[2] For example, "Documents on negotiation: Numsa Education Briefing 5 December 1989", University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 Numsa Education Department, F1.11.
[3] Tony Lane (1974:266) *The Union makes us strong* Arrow Books, London.
[4] Anderson, P (1967:264,265): 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action', in R. Blackburn & A.Cockburn (eds), *The Incompatibles: Trade Unions Militancy and the Consensus*, Fontana, London.
[5] Pityana, Sipho Mila, and Mark Orkin, eds. *Beyond the Factory Floor*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1992; Webster, Eddie (1985): Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg); Webster, Eddie. "The Rise of Social-movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa." In *State, Resistance, and change in South Africa*, edited by Philip Frankel, Noam Pines, and Mark Swilling. London: Croom, Helm, 1988; Von Holdt, K. From Resistance to Reconstruction: A Case Study of Trade Unionism in the Workplace and the Community (1980 - 1996), PHD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, January 2000.
[6] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department, Cosatu Collection Box AH 2373/6.4 "Minutes of the CEC meeting held at Protea Gardens on the 5, 6, & 7 May 1989".
[7] Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*, Ravan Press Braamfontein Johannesburg.
[8] In Witbank, for example, the Defiance Campaign was led by Cosatu and "the entire community was supportive, and it was voluntary. People were beginning to come forward and say, this is how we should wage the struggle." Von Holdt, K. From Resistance to Reconstruction.
[9] For example, Matthews Ntshiwa, a Numsa member conducting his own defiance campaign, scratched the words 'PW [President PW Botha] we want our land', 'Release N Mandela', 'Amandla Ngawethu' and 'Remember our leaders' on his metal mug. A supervisor reported him to the police. Ntshiwa was arrested, held for four months, and then sentenced to three years in prison under the Internal Security Act. The union arranged R3 000 bail for him pending an appeal. By this stage Ntshiwa had been dismissed and as he commented, 'Every potential employer turned me down after he had contacted my former employers.' Ultimately the appeal court set aside Ntshiwa's jail sentence.(Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back*.
[10] Sparks, A (1995) *Tomorrow is Another Country* William Heinemann, United Kingdom.
[11] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997
[12] It took until March 1994 for Lucas Mangope to finally agree to step down as president of Bophutatswana. A strike of 20 000 civil servants in the homeland in March 1994 was accompanied by rampaging and looting in the capital of Mmabatho and a staff seizure of the Bophutatswana Broadcasting Corporation. Mangope appealed to his Cosag (Concerned South Africans Group - an alliance of Afrikaner right-wingers and the homeland governments of KwaZulu, Ciskei, and Bophutatswana) partners and a failed Afrikaner right-wing invasion followed. Soon after Mangope resigned and the homeland was reincorporated in time to participate in the 1994 democratic elections. (see Sparks, A (1995) *Tomorrow is Another Country* for a full description of this battle).
[13] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B2 "The Alliance of ANC/SACP/Cosatu".
[14] Sactu agreed to disband in 1990.
[15] "A South African Communist speaks" *Work in Progress* 68 August 1990.
[16] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B2 "The Alliance of ANC/SACP/Cosatu".
[17] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Cosatu Collection, Box 2373/6.5.
[18] Martin, Ross (1989:113) *Trade Unionism : Purposes and Forms* Clarendon Press, Oxford.
[19] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH2555/B2 "Cosatu enters strategic alliance with ANC/SACP" *Workers Voice* August 1990.
[20] Godongwana had joined the SACP in the early 1980s but now openly declared his affiliation.

[21] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[22] "The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu, the ANC, and the SACP" P.G. Eidelberg in Adler, Glenn and Eddie Webster eds (2000): *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997* Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
[23] Barrell, H (1990) *MK: The ANC's armed struggle* Penguin, Johannesburg.
[24] "Debating Socialism" *Work in Progress* 64, January 1990.
[25] Ibid.
[26] "The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu, the ANC, and the SACP".
[27] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[28] Barrell, H "Conscripts to their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976 - 1986" PhD 1993 Oxford University.
[29] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[30] "The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu, the ANC, and the SACP".
[31] Pityana, SM, and Mark Orkin, eds. *Beyond the Factory Floor* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1992.
[32] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[33] "The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu, the ANC, and the SACP".
[34] "Numsa president accused of spying" Ari Sitas and Snuki Zikalala *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 3 January 1992
[35] Ibid.
[36] *Star: Business Report* 24.10.2003.
[37] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, July 2004.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "Numsa president accused of spying" *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[41] "Numsa 4th National Congress: General Secretary's Report" July 1993, personal copy.
[42] "Numsa president accused of spying" Ari Sitas and Snuki Zikalala *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 3 January 1992.
[43] Baskin, Jeremy (1991): *Striking Back.*
[44] Focus group Numsa Western Cape Region, 1996.
[45] Ibid
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Star: Business Report* 24.10.2003.
[48] Ibid.
[49] "Numsa 4th National Congress: General Secretary's Report" July 1993, personal copy.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "Numsa president accused of spying" *South African Labour Bulletin*.
[52] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[53] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, July 2004.
[54] The security police had raided his home in Alexandra township looking for him just before his return in 1986.
[55] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, July 2004.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Interview Alec Erwin, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[58] According to Maseremule, Xulu had strong support in both Natal regions and later also developed some strong support in the Transvaal.
[59] *Star: Business Report* 24.10.2003.
[60] After the revelation of his `impimpi` status Xulu left the union and in 1993 was shot and left for dead by an unknown AK wielding assassin. He currently lives on a disability pension in Durban. (*Star: Business Report* 24.10.2003.)
[61] "Leading labour and the party" *New Nation* August 3, 1990.
[62] "The two hats debate" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 8 June 1991.
[63] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69 "Membership of political organisations" NC 21 -23 June 1991 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[64] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department,

Numsa Papers AH2555/B2. "Cosatu enters strategic alliance with ANC/SACP" *Workers Voice* August 1990.
[65] Ibid.
[66] "Nationalisation, socialism and the alliance" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No 4 July/August 1993.
[67] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH2555/B2. "Cosatu enters strategic alliance with ANC/SACP" *Workers Voice* August 1990,
[68] Przeworski, Adam (1995: Preface ix) *Sustainable Democracy* Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
[69] Ibid, p107.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, p64.
[73] Roemer, J (1994:11) *A Future for Socialism* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
[74] Wright, E O "Political Power, Democracy and Coupon Socialism" in *Politics and Society* Vol 22 No 1994:353.
[75] As previously noted there were other important national fora that Numsa participated in including housing, electrification, training, and peace ("Reconstructing South Africa: A summary of the national negotiating forums (outside of multi-party talks) that currently exist" personal collection) but influence over labour rights and economic policy were viewed as essential areas in which to intervene.
[76] "Restructuring the economy" *Numsa Bulletin* Vol 2 No 1 April 1991, personal copy.
[77] Ibid.
[78] "Will labour agree to a social contract?" G Daniels *Work in Progress* April 1992.
[79] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[80] "National Economic Forum parallel to CODESA? Cosatu's Sam Shilowa speaks to Eddie Webster and Dot Keet" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 3 Jan 1992.
[81] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[82] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Cosatu Collection Box AH 2373/4 Cosatu Key Policy and Issue Papers & Resolutions from 4th National Congress, July 1991, "Economic Issues".
[83] Prior to the stayaway Cosatu had convened a coalition of organisations known as the VAT Co-ordinating Committee (VCC). It chief demand was for the exemption of VAT on basic foodstuffs. Nactu on Cosatu's invitation joined this forum. Negotiations with government deadlocked however and it was thus that Cosatu and Nactu decided on a two day general strike. The demand for a tripartite negotiating forum was a later addition to this demand and was included on Cosatu's instigation. Immediately after the stayaway, the VCC established public hearings for ordinary people to give testimony on how the introduction of VAT would affect them. A Numsa machine operator for example gave testimony that, "VAT means I can't support my family of five on my income. VAT means I can't have a proper life. I can't even save." Another Numsa member from Brits commented, "If water can be taxed then nothing can ever be cheap" ("Round up on continuing VAT actions" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 5 May/ June 1992; "VAT - a worse tax for a poorer South Africa - Economic Notes" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 2 Oct/Nov 1991; "National general strike `It's more than VAT it's the entire economy` Cosatu GS Jay Naidoo speaks to *South African Labour Bulletin"* Vol 16 No 2 Oct/Nov 1991.)
[84] The numbers who took part in the stayaway were considerably higher than during the September 1989 stayaway on the LRA. The VAT stayaway figures were more comparable with the 16 June 1986 stayaway which had been the largest on record up to this point. University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Cosatu Collection Box AH 2373/12.13.13 "Survey of the 4th and 5th November Stayaway".
[85] "Round up on continuing VAT actions" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 5 May/ June 1992.
[86] "Power in partnerships? Trade Unions, Forums and Transition" S Friedman & Mark Shaw in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997,* (2000:198) eds G Adler and E

Webster (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg).
[87] Ibid, p195.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Interview Enoch Godongwana, Johannesburg, September 2003.
[90] Shubane, K and M Shaw (1993) *Tomorrow's Foundations? Forums as the Second level of a Negotiated Transition in South Africa*, Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg.
[91] "Power in partnerships? Trade Unions, Forums and Transition".
[92] Ibid.
[93] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555 B69 "Interim Government and Constituent Assembly" NC 21-23 June 1991 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[94] "Negotiations, elections and the RDP" *The Shopsteward* Dec 1995, personal copy.
[95] "Millions back mass action" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 7 September /October 1992.
[96] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[97] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme" G Gotz in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997,* (2000) eds G Adler and E Webster Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
[98] Crouch, Colin (1982) *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action* Fontana , Great Britain.
[99] Interview Chris Lloyd, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[100] Interview Bethuel Maseremule, Johannesburg, December 2002.
[101] "Towards a planned economy" Alec Erwin *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 1 April 1989.
[102] Interview Chris Lloyd, Johannesburg, November 1996.
[103] Interview Gavin Hartford, Johannesburg, October 1996.
[104] "Godongwana on the Social Contract: Industrial restructuring and the social contract: reforming capitalism or building blocks for socialism" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 4March/Apr 1992.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[109] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme".
[110] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[111] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[112] The Freedom Charter talks of "The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people; The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole; all other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people." ("The Freedom Charter" in Luckhardt, K and Brenda Wall (1980) *Organize or Starve The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London).
[113] "Numsa 4th National Congress July 1993" personal copy.
[114] Ibid; "The Reconstruction Programme made easy" *The Shopsteward* Vol 2.3 June/July 1993.
[115] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme".
[116] Ibid.
[117] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[118] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme".
[119] "Nationalisation, socialism and the alliance" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No 4 July/August 1993.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

[122] "Amendments to the Cosatu Reconstruction Accord" *Numsa 4th National Congress* July 1993 personal copy.
[123] "Numsa 4th National Congress July 1993" Numsa, September 1993, personal copy.
[124] "Nationalisation, socialism and the alliance" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No 4 July/August 1993.
[125] "Reconstruction Accord " *Numsa 4th National Congress July 1993*, personal copy.
[126] "Nationalisation, socialism and the alliance" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 17 No 4 July/August 1993.
[127] Ibid.
[128] "The Alliance: What's in it for workers?" *The Shopsteward* Vol 3.4 Aug/Sept 1994, personal copy.
[129] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[130] Interview Moses Mayekiso, Johannesburg, December 1996.
[131] University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Documents Department, Numsa Papers AH 2555/B69 "Membership of political organisations" NC June 1991 in *Numsa Policy File June 1987 – March 1992*.
[132] Interview Phil Bokaba, Johannesburg, August 1997.
[133] Interview Mbuyi Ngwenda, Johannesburg, June 1997.
[134] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Cosatu Collection AH 2373/12.40 "Tri-partite Alliance: Reconstruction and Development Programme (Fourth Draft with proposed amendments adopted at Cosatu Special Congress ratified by the Cosatu CEC 19 November, 1993").
[135] University of the Witwatersrand Historical Documents Department Cosatu Collection AH 2373/12.40 "First Draft: Cosatu Comments on 5th Draft of Reconstruction and Development Programme".
[136] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme". G Gotz in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997,* (2000) eds G Adler and E Webster Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
[137] "Cosatu Special Congress: The Uncertain New Era" *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol 19, No 5 1993.
[138] "Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls: Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme".
[139] Negotiations, elections and the RDP *The Shopsteward* Dec 1995, personal copy.
[140] "Labour in government" *The Shopsteward* Vol 3.3 June/July 1994, personal copy.
[141] "What they say" *The Shopsteward* June/July Vol 3.3 1994, personal copy.
[142] Turner, R (1980) *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy* Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
[143] Interview Numsa Scaw Metals Shop Stewards, October 1997. Interview conducted by Tom Bramble.
[144] Von Holdt, K. From Resistance to Reconstruction (2000:21).
[145] Ibid, p22.
[146] Turner, R (1980:74) *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy* Ravan Press, Johannesburg.
[147] Marx K & Engels F (1985:103) *Collected Works Volume 11* London.
[148] Von Holdt, K. From Resistance to Reconstruction (2000).
[149] "Soviets in Italy" New Left Review, 1968:43.
[150] Davidson, Alistair (1977): *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, Merlin Press Ltd, Great Britain.
[151] Hyman, Richard (1972:240) *Strikes*, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow.
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Chapter 15

Conclusion

This work has interrogated how Numsa and its predecessors built power in the 1980s to the mid 1990s and how concepts of workers' control and union independence augmented or detracted from this process. These unions aimed to accrue power both to improve their members' working conditions as well as to effect more fundamental political and economic transformations. These goals influenced the manner in which they constructed power.

At the beginning of the eighties the two Fosatu metal unions, Naawu and Mawu, had inherited a mode of building power that had begun to show results in the late 1970s. Central to this approach was the building of non-racial national industrial unions that cut across the ethnically constituted state. Of equal importance was the promotion of workers' control expressed through strong factory shopsteward structures resting on democratic accountability. Political independence from formal political or other organisations was also pivotal as it permitted the flexibility to respond rapidly, and to alter strategic and policy directions without interference, delays, indecision or the weight of bureaucracy. Union leadership was answerable to membership alone. This strategic approach had proved effective in surfacing the first layers of strong working class leadership, union organizers, and organic intellectuals and would continue to underpin future claims to power. By the end of the 1970s the independent union movement constituted a sufficient threat to the state to force legal reforms which most importantly removed the barriers to the formation of registered African trade unions. Nevertheless numerous obstacles still existed to the building of trade union power in the form of antagonistic employers and a hostile state, ethnic and migrant/urban worker cleavages, and small localized membership in individual factories. Essentially these unions had little organizational, bureaucratic, institutional or informal power to effect widespread concessions in the workplace or to influence the national political or economic agenda.

In the early 1980s Numarwosa/UAW, WPMawu and Mawu focused on constructing greater degrees of democratic organizational and bureaucratic power. This they initially effected through a strategic and focused recruitment campaign bolstered by legal reforms which encouraged fearful workers to join unions. Despite a deepening recession, high rates of unemployment, and escalating repression workers joined in large numbers. They also focused on building strong national industrial unions through the promotion of union unity. Solidarity initiatives resulted in the formation of Naawu in 1981, Cosatu in 1985, and Numsa in 1987. Numsa significantly brought together metalworkers in the auto industry organized into Naawu, metal/engineering workers in Mawu, and motor workers in Micwu, a former Tucsa union. It should be noted that although all

three unions made a decisive break with the Tucsa tradition, Numsa nevertheless absorbed many of its strengths through its merged parts in the areas of bureaucratic efficiency, its focus on the provision of benefits, and its industrial council bargaining strategy. In Numsa metalworkers possessing a common purpose were welded into a large, powerful numerical bloc.

Ultimately however it was these unions' ability to deliver that swelled their ranks. Increased membership augmented their power to force recognition and collective bargaining on employers in individual factories, industrial zones and ultimately across all regions of South Africa. It was through the basis of trade union power, the strike, that crucial concessions were wrung from employers. Pivotal strikes in Mawu and Naawu broke the pattern of infrequent industrial action that had characterised the previous decade. Micwu was still located in Tucsa whose unions rarely engaged in strike action. The militancy and power of these early strikes derived from workers' deteriorating material conditions, strong factory structures which produced high quality leadership, solidarity and sacrifice, numbers involved and from the spontaneous nature of these actions. Successful actions imbued workers with growing levels of confidence, initiative and innovation and increased their determination to win further concessions from capital. In the manner that Fantasia has described, ever widening circles of discontent brought in larger and larger numbers of metalworkers. Although many of these actions were spontaneous in nature, these early unionists were able to extemporize in highly pressured circumstances and to bring a refocusing and deepening of demands which struck more incisively at workers' exploitation. They were also able to adapt organizing strategies to meet different conditions in various industrial zones. Furthermore they were adept at borrowing tactics used by other unions and progressive organisations and adapting them to their needs. The organization of a pivotal factory, frequently accompanied by industrial action, often acted as a bridgehead into unorganised industrial zones and alerted workers to the existence and power of unions.

Through impressive early strikes, metalworkers were able to win recognition in individual factories, to establish critical worker rights, such as grievance, dismissal and retrenchment procedures, and to establish a measure of control, dignity and humanity in their working lives. Important precedents too were set. Autoworkers in the 1980 Volkswagen strike were able to define and popularize the concept of a living wage, whilst metal workers in the 1981/2 pension strikes assailed racially constituted benefits and established the right for workers to be represented on pension boards. Mawu initiated pioneering tripartite (union, employer, government) negotiations as a result of these strikes. Union members also began to establish worker controlled structures across industrial areas and to thus broaden their solidarity efforts. Widespread mobilization and industrial action had the effect of raising workers' political awareness as they began to experience their exploitation in the workplace on a continuum with their political oppression. Thus industrial action began to erode the very constructs of apartheid. Black workers

were challenging racially defined workplace injustices, and in defiance of apartheid divide and rule strategies had united to wage struggles across ethnic and urban/rural divides.

The formation of Numsa, and the consolidation of power that it represented, allowed for the building of a more efficient bureaucracy to support organizational and bargaining activities. The new union was largely successful, although some weaknesses were apparent, in integrating the differing ideological, bureaucratic and organisational traditions of its merged parts. The acquisition of a greater internal cohesion and representational and bureaucratic capacity permitted Numsa to strategise around the mobilization of all metalworkers to effect changes to the entire industry. This it aimed to do by building strong national negotiating forums in each of its industries while achieving parity in working conditions across all its industries. To achieve this aim it built national structures where common demands and bargaining strategies were developed and which also allowed for a focus on the specifics of each industry. Demands were popularized and communicated to membership through the creation of a national campaigns structure.

Mawu had made the decision to enter the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry (Nicisemi) in 1983 despite it being a controversial decision in the independent union movement of the time. Naawu had already demonstrated that it was possible to build industry wide power by utilizing this state institution without sacrificing worker participation and militancy. Mawu had come to realize that as it grew it no longer had the capacity to bargain and service all the individual factories it had mobilized. Joining the Nicisemi was an important moment although some time would elapse before metalworkers would feel the benefits of building power on this institution. Before 1987 the union had not accumulated sufficient power to rupture the white union/employer bloc on the Nicisemi. Mawu consistently achieved wage increases below the inflation rate and refused to sign the Main Agreement in an attempt to expose corrupt bargaining patterns on the Council. It was confronted with the conundrum of how to build power on the Nicisemi whilst continuing to deliver gains to its membership. In consequence it adopted an `all level bargaining` position whereby it continued to plant bargain and to make significant gains in individual companies both at local and national levels whilst simultaneously engaging employers on the Nicisemi.

The emergence of Numsa allowed for a new injection of muscle which it determined to employ in constructing power on the Nicisemi. In order to realize this goal it built power on a number of fronts both within, and outside of, the Industrial Council. It assembled a highly visible Living Wage Campaign which enabled it to shape workers' grievances into a set of negotiable demands. In this manner it successfully built hegemony across the industry amongst black workers as it mobilized and recruited large numbers and welded Numsa into a genuine national union. Simultaneously it pursued an aggressive plant bargaining strategy in which it achieved notable

gains in both wage and non wage spheres. Such successes were employed to benchmark demands at the Nicisemi. The union built National Company [Shopsteward] Councils in all its major companies to standardize conditions across large national companies and which also acted as strategic think-tanks on how to construct power. It was thus that Numsa in a paradoxical manner led a campaign against the Nicisemi in order to build power on the Nicisemi. Its dual bargaining strategy ensured that member participation was not undermined through institutional bargaining on the Nicisemi in the manner that Tarrow and other labour commentators believe union movements can be destablilised. In 1988 Numsa waged its first, and critical, industry wide `strategic strike` on the Witwatersrand which was supported by workers in large companies where it had built Company Councils and whose employers were major players on the Nicisemi. Employers were forced to concede wages above inflation and to acknowledge Numsa as the major bargaining partner on the Nicisemi. From this point Numsa played a central part in the activities of the Council and accepted its central role in forging, and signing, the Main Agreement which would be extended to thousands of organized and unorganized workers in the engineering industry. It had demonstrated that bargaining on the Nicisemi was not a zero sum game where participation could only proceed at the expense of plant bargaining. The union however confronted issues of solidarity in terms of its broader strategy of uplifting all workers in the industry as a result of its dual bargaining strategy. A number of companies withdrew during the 1988 strike after they had settled higher wages at plant level thus undermining the power of the strike.

In the auto industry the union aimed to accrue power on the Eastern Cape Industrial Council for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry. Naawu's components having originally emerged from the Tucsa fold did not have the same qualms as Mawu about entering the Industrial Council. It too had to establish itself as a force on the Council in order to rupture the cosy employer/white union bloc. The more homogenous nature of the industry which consisted of a small number of large auto companies rendered this task less onerous than in the engineering industry. As early as 1980 Numarwosa had established itself as the major bargaining party on the Council. Naawu nevertheless employed plant bargaining as a means of applying pressure during Industrial Council negotiations. Unlike, engineering, many auto companies were foreign owned which allowed the union to effectively mobilize international union solidarity when in dispute with individual companies. It also successfully employed grasshopper strikes which rolled across companies and which were located in key sections of the production process. Such tactics at plant level however did not constitute and `all level` bargaining strategy but rather aimed to bolster its power at industry wide Council negotiations. Over time Naawu achieved considerable gains in raising the living wage, reducing hours of work, winning worker public holidays, and establishing maternity (later parental rights) and other benefits.

As the auto industry expanded and relocated to other parts of the country, partly to circumvent the union in the manner that Beverley has described is common to auto companies worldwide, the union embarked on intensive organization of large plants in the Transvaal. Here no Industrial Council existed and it was obliged to plant bargain. It engaged in pattern bargaining utilizing gains won on the Eastern Cape Industrial Council as a basis for its living wage demands. Through some major strikes it proved highly successful in organizing these plants and in improving work conditions and wages. Its challenge now was to build national power across the industry where it aimed to establish a single national auto bargaining forum. Through a series of countrywide co-ordinated strikes it was able to achieve this goal in 1989 and to establish the auto industry National Bargaining Forum (NBF).

By 1989 Numsa had achieved national bargaining forums in all of its sectors, two of which had harnessed considerable power. The motor industry however lacked the power to assert changes across its industry. This was a function of union organisational weaknesses, the scattered nature of the industry often located in micro workplaces, and conservative, often deeply racist employers. In its other industries however Numsa was poised to shape work conditions industry wide. It had by 1989 attained high levels of unified working class power and significant degrees of organisational and institutional power and influence in a strategic sector of the economy. For the first time it was in a position to engage employers on workplace conditions as well as structural problems in its industries which it believed were in large measure responsible for low productivity and widespread job loss.

Numsa's ability to democratically restructure the metal industry and its ability to assert working class interests and influence in the period of transition leading to a new democratic South Africa, was uneven. In the early 1990s it achieved considerable bargaining successes in auto and engineering through its engagement in national bargaining forums in both wage and non-wage spheres. It was able to raise both actual, and minimum wage levels above inflation rates, enhance worker benefits in a gender sensitive manner, create a Metal Industry National Provident Fund which included worker representatives on its board, gain access to the Metal Industries Medical Fund, restructure the Sick Fund, ensure more equitable retrenchment payouts and benefits, reduce working hours and extend agreements to union-hostile Bantustans. In the auto industry, over a period of one year in 1991, it was able to achieve a moratorium on retrenchments, and when the agreement collapsed it negotiated a Work Security Fund to make provision for retrenchment and retraining. Such gains were a considerable achievement in a society that was riven by violence and social upheaval. Yet by 1995 its Three Year Bargaining Programme and it industrial restructuring aims had not been realized in a sufficiently forceful manner to enable it to inject a working class economic programme on employers or the new democratic government.

In the 1990s negotiations evolved into longer more complex processes. Issues concerning the restructuring of the metal industry, job loss, and the skills crisis were discussed with a growing seriousness. The problematic 1992 strike in engineering was a turning point for the union. Numsa was confronted with the dilemma of further eroding the industry through its militant strike tactics, or of engaging employers in a more creative process of building a sustainable industry. It decided to pursue the latter through a strategy of extending working class influence in order to develop an ethos of greater industrial democracy. In effect it continued to build power in its previous incremental mode, constrained however by pressures of time which were posed by the imminent possibility of the collapse of the apartheid regime. The building of a new vision was realised through the adoption of a Three Year Bargaining Programme which drew on insights the union had previously developed between 1990 -1992 in its Research & Development Groups (RDGs). These Groups had aimed to elaborate a body of worker-informed research on the restructuring of Numsa's industries. The Training RDG, in particular, had assumed a central importance in Numsa's ideas around restructuring its industries. The RDGs had however folded, despite the involvement of worker leadership, mainly due to an ability to infuse their recommendations amongst broader membership. The Three Year Bargaining Programme was a complex and integrated set of demands which involved a nexus of training and grading into a broad band of skills linked to an agreed wage increase over a three year period. The integrated package involved a more open, less adversarial co-determinist discussion with employers and in some areas with government. Numsa's Industrial Restructuring Programme ran parallel to this new bargaining approach and aimed to engage employers on more productive ways of managing their industries. The Three Year Programme was adopted enthusiastically by sections of Numsa's leadership and resulted in it engaging in a wide range of restructuring forums both within its industries and more broadly with government and civil society. It influenced Cosatu's style and focus in its engagement with the state in this transitional period to democracy.

The new bargaining strategy had the effect of bringing a fresh focus to its least powerful and most neglected motor sector. An influx of new membership, a changed political environment, and new motor leadership rapidly wrought changes. Numsa focused on rebuilding the National Industrial Council for the Motor Industry (Nicmi) which was deadlocked in a three year employer blockade in an attempt to collapse the Council. During this time motor workers received no wage increases. Organisers and shopstewards drew on tactics that Naawu and Mawu had utilized in the 1970s and 1980s to organize their industries, but were more able rapidly to organize the industry in the changed environment of the 1990s where unions were an established feature. Industry wide wage increases rapidly followed and training and other benefits soon were put in place.

Numsa was not however successfully able to implement its Industrial Restructuring or Three Year Bargaining Programme as an integrated package. The programme was never coherently negotiated

and its logic was undermined by piecemeal implementation in sections of Numsa's industries. It unraveled at the workplace level where practical and ideological confusion mitigated against its successful implementation. The confusion revealed a conspicuous gap between leadership and membership around ideas underpinning the programme. Delivery delays in national negotiations frustrated membership whilst national negotiators found themselves in the contradictory position of engaging employers in a process of building a more viable industry whilst experiencing pressure from below to engage in adversarial bargaining. Although a more efficient union bureaucracy had been built, union structures had become more complex, on the ground servicing of membership had declined, and a lack of systematic membership education and debate was apparent. All these factors meant that membership had become progressively more distanced from union leadership and union policies. Tensions emerged in union goals. Membership remained focused on the struggle for increased wages whilst leadership was attempting to restructure industry in order to stem job losses, enhance worker skills and pay and to augment workers' control in the workplace. The alienation of membership from union goals did not however take the form depicted by Michels whereby membership gradually become subject to a professional leadership`s `iron law of oligarchy`. The concept of worker democracy was still deeply embedded in the fabric of the union and the shopfloor remained a vibrant and autonomous force despite an alienation from national policy. Widespread industrial action continued which demonstrated that institutionalised national bargaining had not succeeded in limiting the ability for union members to pursue their collective interests in the manner delineated by Fantasia. The willingness to take action in defence of bargaining gains ensured that Numsa negotiators in bargaining institutions could not operate without the union's base. Paradoxically, shopfloor militancy ensured that the union maintained a degree of autonomy from the bargaining institutions it was simultaneously invested in strengthening. In a correct balance this would have been a healthy tension but in this case membership and union leadership goals were too widely at odds.

Fault lines also became apparent in the assumptions behind the Three Year Programme. International experience began to reveal that the educated, multiskilled flexible workers of the future was a minority experience. In South Africa few employers were utilizing participative management techniques or advanced computer technology. Enormous differences also existed between the three metal sectors and achieving parity across the metal industry was unrealistic. The low level of skill in South Africa was a further a barrier to pursuing the `quick fix` training/promotion model. Some unionists leveled the accusation that the training route to a restructured workplace was as an ideological cover for employers and government to claim they were addressing workplace inequalities whilst in reality workers were experiencing little improvement. In addition, the union's argument for increased workplace technical and other training was not accompanied by thoroughgoing political discussion, in the manner that Turner and Gramsci advocated, on the nature and implications of management innovations. Thus workers

ceased to control the new bargaining programme and the union's call for training proceeded in an ideological vacuum. Although some employers agreed to elements of the Programme, in the main companies were reluctant to effect fundamental changes. The union had underestimated the tenacity of apartheid practices and deeply held attitudes in factories. Workers too had not made the ideological shift to a more co-determinist approach. Membership were still engaged in class war and the strikes that proliferated were as much an expression of years of accumulated rage and frustration at apartheid' inhumanities as a means of gaining more money or correcting an injustice.

Such militancy however did not necessarily enhance metalworkers' power to alter their situation in a new South Africa. It appeared that although leadership had developed a set of integrated demands to ensure a powerful workers' voice in a future South Africa this was not possible to achieve in a brief transitional period. Workers were locked in the anger of the past and needed the space to vent this frustration before the union could develop a new broadly endorsed vision. The end of apartheid was not characterized by a revolutionary rupture yet the need for a breakdown in order to create spaces was probably necessary in order to reconstruct. In the rapidly changing pressurized environment, Numsa leadership abandoned its careful incremental approach of the 1970s and 1980s and in so doing lost the power of membership's creative engagement. The organizational pragmatism that had always been the union's strength was still apparent in the Three Year Programme, but it had failed to infuse hegemonic support amongst its membership and thus no consensus existed on how to proceed and on how to harness working class power. The union lost the opportunity to begin the process of forging a fresh consensus in the face of a changed government whose attitude to working class power was ambivalent.

Accompanying the ideological vacuum was a high degree of instability in the union which reflected a society undergoing rapid change. Old structures were disappearing, new ones being created, experienced leadership was moving out whilst new leaders struggled to find their feet. In this context the union was clearly over ambitious in its restructuring aims. It was impossible for an institution of its size to tackle a society riven with inequalities whilst it was simultaneously losing a degree of internal organizational coherence.

In the sphere of politics, the union demonstrated a similar neglect of the ideological terrain and thus also lost the opportunity to effect a deeper infusion of its socialist leanings. In the 1970s up to the mid 1980s Numsa's predecessors, Naawu and Mawu, asserted a strong independence from formal political or other organisations. Despite their long term political goals they stood aloof from popular township politics and were not persuaded to dilute their socialist, or `workerist` position, particularly as they contended that unions had not yet developed sufficient power to direct such politics. This position was contested however by emerging working class leadership in Fosatu (this contestation was particularly visible in Mawu) who were under growing pressure from

township organizations to engage politically. Such pressures moved them towards a more explicit engagement in temporary alliances which assured their independence in short-term limited actions predicated on workers' control, or as independent entities involved in parallel activity in popular political campaigns. This deferalism however lost them the opportunity to influence the style and content of township politics and to imprint a deeper socialist vision onto local struggles at a time when the ideological content of the liberation struggle was not yet set. In the process of debate and contested politics however shopsteward leadership developed significant degrees of political awareness which, accompanied by rising levels of mobilization and repression, shifted many into active engagement in community politics where the strength of their bottom up organizational experience was in evidence.

Ultimately Cosatu and its strongest manufacturing union, Numsa, were not successful in imparting a strong worker, or socialist bias onto a future South Africa state. The metal unions' early deferalism aside, other factors also militated against its socialist project. The civil war that erupted in Natal in 1988, spread to the Transvaal in 1990, and continued until 1994 was one of these. While it is undoubtedly true that Numsa played a significant role in reducing the scale of the violence, it was not entirely free from blame. It failed to create a `counter hegemony` which would decisively break the ideological link between the capitalist ruling class, the apartheid state and the general black population. From the early days Mawu had been acutely aware of the dangers that Zulu nationalism held for progressive organisations and trade unions. It had thus wooed Chief Buthelezi and won the space to organize in areas that fell into the Kwa Zulu homeland. Yet thereafter it had neglected the migrant sector of its working class membership who would later feed directly into the violence. In the early days, Mawu and Naawu had some significant success in uniting disparate elements of the working class. Coloured and African, old and young, and migrant and urban metalworkers had been welded together in a single national union with common aims. Later in the 1980s however, sections of its working class membership, and in the working class more broadly, came into in dispute with each other although they were equally oppressed in the political sphere. The unemployed youth came into conflict with working class wage earners, migrants conflicted with urban workers, squatters and youth, the black peasantry was alienated from the organized industrial working class, and racial cleavages continued to exist between white and black workers. Working class power had been deeply eroded. Opportunities had existed for Numsa to inculcate a counter hegemonic vision which it had missed, and as the violence escalated its capacity to educate and influence membership and their constituencies waned. Without a working class unitary vision, the possibility of pursuing a socialist alternative was remote. It was thrown into an ever closer alliance with the ANC and its national democratic, anti-apartheid project as they both battled against their Machiavellian opponents. The state ultimately failed in its attempts to destabilize the national democratic struggle, and its opponent the ANC was victorious despite staring a nationwide civil war in the face. There is no doubt that Numsa and the Cosatu

unions made an important contribution to the birth of a non-racial democracy. Yet in the long term the capitalist state was the victor. Numsa and Cosatu's attention was distracted from their capitalist opponent, but more than this the state had succeeded in demobilizing trade unions and other organs of civil society from pursuing fundamental systemic change. This was the state's long term counter-revolutionary success.

As previously explored, Numsa failed to diffuse its socialist perspective amongst workers and into the society more generally. In the early days it had viewed politics as a zero sum game unlike its more complex approach to its bargaining agenda where it made power-broking decisions such as joining the Industrial Council. In the political sphere the union did not demonstrate the same strategic flexibility that it showed in other parts of its union life. The union also seemed not to bring the same focus to its politics as it did to its bargaining and organizational endeavours. It displayed an ongoing inability to formulate a socialist programme despite a number of resolutions to do so. It failed to concretely demonstrate through the production of such a programme that it positioned itself in opposition to the SACP's bureaucratic centralism and that, whilst it supported many of the sentiments in the Freedom Charter, it aimed to deepen and extend its clauses. This neglect may have partly arisen from a fear of splitting the movement of the left by producing a document which some would interpret as challenging the contents of the Freedom Charter and by extension the ANC. In consequence it possessed no programme through which it could guide, ground and popularize its politics. It was not able to persuade the working class more generally that the Freedom Charter and a socialist programme could be complementary. Thus the Freedom Charter stood unqualified and uncontested. By the time it produced the concept of a Reconstruction Accord, which was later developed into the Alliance's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the space was no longer available to popularise a socialist perspective. The goals and coherence of the RDP were in consequence severely undermined.

Perhaps it is unrealistic to have expected an overstretched union such as Numsa to have disseminated a counter hegemonic position amongst its membership and their constituencies in any coherent manner. It did however project itself as having the right to make political interventions and its aim was for labour to spearhead a socialist movement. Yet it never seriously considered establishing a worker sympathetic party, in the manner Gramsci propounded, that would confer political expression to the realization of workers' control. A party that would assist in suffusing a counter-hegemonic view amongst a broader working class. Its reluctance to consider such a path may again have been related to the fear of dividing the anti-apartheid movement and of contesting the ANC/SACP's historical legacy, but it may also have emanated from its syndicalist leanings which fought shy of bureaucratic parliamentary democracy as a form of democratic participation and which viewed the workplace as the locus of political power. In the absence of an alternative

workers party or socialist programme through which to popularize its ideas Numsa's (and Mawu's) politics remained at the level of reaction and ultimately did not posit a serious challenge.

Yet possibilities remained. Although Numsa forewent its early `party autonomous` position when Cosatu entered the ANC/SACP alliance, it was clearly far from a `state ancillary` stance. More than any other Cosatu union it asserted its independence in relation to the ruling or other political parties. Its 1993 National Congress went as far as to resolve to break the alliance after the 1994 elections and to hold a socialist conference. It had lost a measure of independent power when it submitted to the ANC's national democratic perspective which, although sympathetic to the concerns of the poor, did not position itself as accountable to workers. Yet labour had won the right to be consulted in the tripartite Nedlac which some socialists in its ranks argued allowed for the deepening of democratic governance and for the possibility of developing an economic egalitarianism that ensured labour would not be marginalized. It had also won the right to strike. Both these advances permitted an independent leverage from which to launch the second stage of struggle for socialism for which a tendency in Numsa had argued. The possibility still existed however for the ruling party to by-pass a tripartite forum such as Nedlac and to assert the ultimate decision making power of parliament, where in the case of the ANC it held the majority of seats. The institutionalisation of conflict through Nedlac also held the danger of dissent being diverted into bureaucratic chambers and regulations thus preventing the use of the spontaneous power of the general strike which syndicalists saw as labour's ultimate weapon.

This thesis has demonstrated that the building of power is a complex matter. These metal unionists were pioneering agents in wielding power in a layered manner which was to bring them multiple successes in a short space of time. It is hoped that the next generation of metal unionists will be able to learn something from this innovative history, both in respect of its boldness and the warnings it contains. These unions have demonstrated that winning trade union and working class power is a continuous process of organsation at all levels from the local to the welding of national industrial centres of power. In this process of constructing power lies the caveat that workers' participation, debate and contestation is ignored at peril. In order for working people to fight for, and defend strategies thorough education and consultation is necessary. Equally, for change of a more systemic nature to occur, the process of building an `integrated culture` or counter-hegemony remains central. The rich heritage described here can be used as a point of departure for the creation of new ground-breaking and inventive ways to win further rights and deepen democratic exchange for the working and marginalized people of South Africa.

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Sources

1. Profile of Interviewees

Adler, Taffy began work as a volunteer in the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) where he became a full-time employee in 1976, followed by employment in its successors the Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand (CIWW), the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (Tuacc) Transvaal, and later, in 1979, becoming Fosatu Transvaal Regional Secretary. He was appointed an organiser for Naawu Transvaal in 1981, and later became Naawu's first National Education Secretary in 1983. He left the union in 1986.

Barry, Gloria was a former Eveready worker who was employed by Numarwosa in 1975. She left the union to become a worker at General Motors where she was later elected vice-president of Numarwosa. On the formation of Naawu she was elected national treasurer. She joined Naawu as a national administrator in 1981, and in 1984 became an organiser. On the formation of Numsa she was elected Eastern Cape Regional Secretary of Numsa a position she held between 1988 -1993. In 1994 she became an ANC member of parliament in the Eastern Cape.

Bird, Adrienne worked in Fosatu education structures until the launch of Cosatu in 1985 when she moved to Mawu, and later Numsa as the Witwatersrand Regional Educator in 1987. She was appointed Numsa's national training co-ordinator in 1991. She left the union in 1994 to work in the Centre for Education Policy Development, and the Metal Engineering Industry Education Training Board.

Dantjies, Peter was a Brits Young Christian Worker (YCW) volunteer who joined Mawu in 1984. He joined Numsa as an organiser and later became Numsa Northern Transvaal Regional Secretary and an acting General Secretary of Numsa.

Dube, Daniel joined UAW in 1977 at SKF in Port Elizabeth and was a senior shopsteward in SKF when the union merged to become Naawu. He was elected to Cosatu's first Executive, and later became Numsa president at its founding congress in 1987. He is now the SKF representative on the Metal Industries Provident Fund.

East, Des worked in the furniture industry before joining Micwu in 1976 as Assistant Divisional Secretary of the Transvaal. He was appointed Divisional Secretary shortly thereafter and became General Secretary in 1981and a Tucsa Vice President in 1983. On merger into Numsa he became

the National Administrative Secretary a position he held until leaving in 1991 to become the IMF Southern Africa Co-ordinating Secretary.

Ehrenreich, Tony began work in the motor industry in 1983 as a motor mechanic. He joined Numsa at McCarthys, an Anglo American company, in the Western Cape and was elected a shopsteward. In 1990 he was employed by Numsa's Western Cape branch as a motor organiser. He became Numsa's Motor Sector Co-ordinator in January 1995 and left the union in 1996 to become Cosatu's Western Cape Regional Secretary.

Erwin, Alec was general secretary of both Tuacc and Fosatu at their inception, and became Fosatu's national Education Secretary between 1983 – 1985. On the dissolution of Fosatu and the formation of Cosatu he was appointed Cosatu National Education Secretary between 1986 -1987. He joined Numsa in 1987 to become National Education Secretary, a position he held until the 1994 democratic elections when he was appointed Minister of Finance, later becoming Minister of Trade and Industry.

Esau, Ekki was a Regional Secretary of Micwu in Natal in the 1970s, and in the 1980s a Natal regional secretary of the IMF (International Metal Federation). He later became Regional Secretary of Numsa Southern Natal and the co-ordinator of Numsa's motor sector. He left the union in 1994.

Fanaroff, Bernie joined Tuacc in 1976, and worked as a part-time Mawu organiser in 1976. In 1977 he became a full-time organiser. He was appointed Mawu's acting general secretary in 1985-6 during Moses Mayekiso's detention. In 1987 in Numsa he was appointed National Secretary Organising and Collective Bargaining and in 1990 became National Secretary Organising. He left the union in May 1994 to become Deputy Director General in the Office of the President and to be an advisor on the RDP to Minister Jay Naidoo.

Fredricks, Brian began his union life as an organiser for Micwu in the late 1960s. He became an organiser for Numarwosa in 1974, and held the same position in Naawu. He later became the South African secretary of the International Metalworkers Federation and left to join the IMF in Geneva where he rose to assistant general secretary.

Godongwana, Enoch was a worker at H Funkie & Co (later Barlow Engineering) when he joined Mawu in 1982 and became a head shopsteward and shopsteward chair of the Barlow Rand Group. He held the position of Treasurer on the Transvaal Branch Executive and was a Mawu NEC delegate. He was employed by the union as a Springs local organiser in 1983. In 1984 he left Mawu to join Ummawusa and returned to Numsa in 1987 as an organiser. In 1988 he was a

national organiser for the engineering sector. In 1990 he became a local organiser in Butterworth, Eastern Cape and was Numsa's Border Regional Secretary from 1990 - 1994. He was a Numsa General Secretary from 1994 - 1997 when he left to become the Eastern Cape MEC for Economic Affairs & Finance in 1998.

Grice, Jenny joined the union in 1987 as the National Education Administrator. In 1992 she became its National Publications Officer.

Hartford, Gavin was employed as an Eastern Cape organiser in 1985 in Naawu and later became the Port Elizabeth branch secretary. On the formation of Numsa he became a national organiser for the tyre and rubber sector. He worked as an Eastern Province regional educator in 1990 and thereafter returned to his position as a national organiser. He left the union in 1996 to join the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation & Arbitration.

Isaacs, Jenny joined Micwu in 1983 as an administrator. She joined Numsa at the time of merger in 1987 as Administrative Assistant to Des East. In 1992 she took over from East as the Numsa National Administrative Secretary. She left the union in 2002.

Kettledas, Les was a technician at General Motors where he joined the union in 1968, and was elected onto the branch executive of Numarwosa. He was expelled in 1972 for leading a rebel group who were organising African workers into the parallel UAW. He was reinstated and elected branch secretary in 1974. He joined Naawu in 1981 as an organiser. He held the position of Fosatu Regional Secretary in the Eastern Cape from 1979 - 1985 and was Cosatu acting Eastern Cape Regional Secretary from 1985 - 1987. He went into Numsa in 1987 as a National Organiser for the Auto Sector. He left the union 1995 to join the Department of Labour where he became its director general.

Kgalima, Victor was a local organiser in Numsa who later became the co-ordinator of Numsa's education and training unit. He left the union in 1997 to work in the Department of Labour.

Kgobe, Tony joined Mawu in 1983 and worked as an organiser in the Wadeville/Alberton/Germiston area. In 1982 he became Cosatu's Witwatersrand Regional Secretary and declined re-election in 1988 to move into Numsa where he became a Johannesburg local organiser. In 1990 he was appointed co-ordinator of a number of Numsa national Company Councils, and 1993 became Numsa regional secretary in Wits Central West. He later in 1995 became the national auto sector co-ordinator. In 1998 at the time of interview he was executive director of Numsa Investment Company.

Khubeka, Sipho was a clerk at Immextra who was dismissed for union activities in 1974. He joined

the Industrial Aid Society in the Transvaal, and went on to become the branch secretary of Mawu before his banning in 1976. He later became an organiser, and general secretary of the Paper, Print & Allied Workers Union (Ppwawu).

Lloyd, Chris was an Australian metal union organiser who was employed as a national engineering organiser in Numsa in August 1992 and left the union in 1996.

Mabayakhulu, Mike joined Mawu in 1982 at Mintec in Natal and became a senior shopsteward and member of Mawu's NEC. He was dismissed in 1983 and became a Natal organiser for Mawu in 1984 and later moved into Numsa. He left the union to enter the Kwa Zulu/Natal provincial parliament.

Madlala, Khayo was a Mawu shopsteward at Gedore Tools in Durban's Pinetown industrial area. He joined Mawu in the early 1970s.

Marie, Bobbie joined Mawu in 1984 as a regional organiser in the Natal Branch in Durban. He became Mawu Natal regional secretary in 1984 and a national organiser in 1985. He moved into Numsa in 1987 as a national organiser and became its National Education Co-ordinator between 1994 -1996. He left Numsa in 1996 to join the labour college Ditsela.

Maseremule, Bethuel joined Mawu in 1986 at the Barlow subsidiary Aluminium Extrusion in Boksburg North where he rose to become chair of the shopstewards committee. He was retrenched in 1987 and joined Numsa as a local organiser in Kempton Park. He left the union in 1989 and returned as a local organiser in the Germiston area. On the launch of the Wits East Region he became its Regional Secretary. He left the union in 1994 to join the Farmworkers Research Project and now works for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES).

Matlala, Kosi originally worked for NUTW (National Union of Textile Workers) in Germiston.She was recruited into Mawu in 1984 after the union split to head up administration and finances in the new head office in Harrister House in Johannesburg. In Numsa she became an administrator in the organising department and subsequently moved to Pretoria as a senior administrator in the offices of Numsa's Northern Transvaal Region.

Makama, Nehemia, widely known as 'Baba Kay' was a worker at Heinemann in 1976 when workers' struck and he was dismissed. He was then employed by Mawu as an organiser and transferred to Numsa as an organiser in 1987. He retired in 1996 and returned to his home in Swaziland.

Mayekiso, Moses (Moss) joined Mawu in Toyota in Kew Johannesburg in the late 1970s. He was dismissed and became an organiser for Mawu on the East Rand. He was elected branch secretary of the Transvaal Branch in 1982, and later became general secretary of both Mawu and Numsa, holding this position in Numsa despite successive detentions and a prolonged treason trial in the late 1980s. He was acquitted in 1989. In 1990 he became president of the Alexandra Civic Organisation. He left the union to become a member of parliament after the 1994 democratic elections.

Mbanjwa, Dumisane was a Mawu member at Huletts in Durban. On dismissal he became a Mawu Natal organiser and later a Numsa organiser. Between 1992 -1996 he was a National Education Co-ordinator in Numsa. He left the union in 1996.

Mchunu, Willys joined Mawu in 1974 from the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund. He became a shopsteward at the Turner and Newell subsidiary Ferodo. He was recruited as an organiser in 1978 in Mawu's Natal Branch where he worked with Naawu's Brain Fredricks to organise Toyota in Durban. In 1982 he became an organiser in Mawu's Northern Natal Branch where he remained until 1994. He left Numsa in 1994 to join the KwaZulu/Natal Provincial Legislature where he is Deputy Speaker.

Modimoeng, David was a Brits Young Christian Worker (YCW) who became a the first organiser for Mawu in the Pretoria local which included Brits. He was also active in the Brits Action Committee and lost his wife in a firebombing of his house in 198? He moved into Numsa as an organiser and left the union after the first democratic election to become an ANC councillor in Brits and later its mayor.

Mokgalo, Dorothy joined Mawu in 1981at National Bolts in Boksburg. She was elected a shopsteward in 1985 in a male dominated factory employing only 15 women. She was later elected secretary of the Johannesburg local education sub-committee and rose to become Numsa Nedcom (National Education Committee) chair and Cosatu's first gender co-ordinator. She died in a taxi accident in 1997.

Monage, Elias became interested in trade unions when he was a member of the Katlehong Youth League. He joined Mawu in Don Products in 1984 where he became a shopsteward. In 1991 he became a Numsa organiser on the East Rand and was later appointed a National Negotiator for the engineering sector. He left the union in 2003.

Mthethwa, Samuel joined Dunlop Sydney Road in Durban in 1974. A decade later he joined Mawu bringing the union into the company. In 1984 he was elected chair of the shopstewards

committee. He left the union in 1994 to become an ANC provincial MEC.

Murphy, Mike worked in the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund before he became General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in 1974. He was banned from union and political activity in 1976, and subsequently left for Britain where he became Fosatu's International Research Officer.

Nala (Hartley) June-Rose was a Frame Afrotex worker who joined the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund in 1972. She was dismissed in 1973 and became a National Union of Textile Workers' (NUTW) organiser. She was detained without trial in 1976 and thereafter joined Mawu in Durban where she became its general secretary in 1977. In 1981 she became Mawu's branch secretary in Northern Natal. She left the union in 1983 to study at Ruskin College in Oxford.

Ndamase, Jeffrey was a migrant worker from the Transkei with no formal education and no knowledge of English who joined Uwusa in 1985 and moved over to Mawu in 1986. He became head shopsteward at Iscor a position he held until his death in 2002.

Nene, Joe joined Mawu in 1983 and was a shopsteward at Dunlop Sydney Road in both Mawu and Numsa, He left the union in 1995 to become chairperson of the Durban Metropolitan Council.

Ngwenda, Mbuyi was expelled from Fort Hare during student protests and was thereafter employed at Volkswagen. He joined Naawu in 1984 where he became a shopsteward. He was detained for three years from 1986 under the State of Emergency, returned to Volkswagen and was elected a Numsa office bearer, later becoming general secretary of Numsa in 1997. He retired from the position because of illness and died in 1999.

Ntuli, Richard was a shopsteward at Litemaster and chairperson of the Transvaal Branch, and of the Katlehong Local covering Germiston, Wadeville and Alberton in the early 1980s. He was dismissed from Litemaster in 1983 and became a Mawu, and later a Numsa organiser on the East Rand where he still works.

Pheku, Peet was a worker at Heckitt when he joined the Industrial Aid Society in 1972. He began secretly organising Heckitt workers, and later Dunswart Steel workers. He was fired in 1997 and became first a voluntary and then permanent organiser for Mawu. He organised from the first Mawu local offices in Boksburg. He later transferred to Numsa as an organiser and left the union in 1996.

Schreiner, Geoff joined Mawu in its Natal Pietermaritzburg branch in 1979 and became the Natal

branch secretary in 1983. In 1984 he became Mawu National Education Secretary. He moved into Numsa to become a national research officer in head office. He left the union in 1996.

Smith, Alistair joined Mawu in May 1986 as local organiser for Johannesburg. He moved over to Numsa in 1987 and became a national shopsteward council organiser for Barlow Rand, Metal Box and Siemens. In 1989 he became a national organiser for the engineering sector. He took a year off from the union in 1992 and returned as a research co-ordinator in 1993. He left the union to join the Independent Mediation Services of South Africa and later became Secretary of the Metal & Engineering Industries Bargaining Council.

Tom, Mtutuzeli joined the SA Allied Workers Union (Saawu) at Mercedez Benz but crossed the floor to join Naawu in 1984 where he became a shopsteward. He is currently Numsa's president.

Vilane, Jeffrey joined Mawu in 1973 as an Alusaf worker, became head shopsteward in 1974, and the Fosatu Northern Natal Regional Chair from 1980 - 1985. He was Mawu President from 1984 - 1987 and Cosatu Northern Natal Regional Chair from 1987 - 1989. He resigned from Alusaf in 1991 to establish the ANC Northern Natal region under the auspices of the Maputoland Development Agency. He became an ANC councillor in 1996 and an ANC KwaZulu Natal MEC in 1999.

Woodington, Alfred was initially employed as a Numsa organiser. He later, in response to the violence on the East Rand in the late 1980s/early 1990s became the convenor for Numsa's crisis unit at its Germiston Office. He then moved to Numsa's head office to work in its welfare department and left soon after to work in Spoornet's security department**.**

2. Trade Union Newspapers

Fosatu Worker News
Naawu News
Umbiko we Mawu
SA Metal Worker
Numsa Bulletin
Numsa Motor News
Numsa News
Numsa Campaigns Update
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