

“Building Tomorrow Today”: a re-examination of the character of the controversial
“workerist” tendency associated with the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu)
in South Africa, 1979 – 1985.

Sian Deborah Byrne
MA Industrial Sociology
University of the Witwatersrand
2012

Title Pages

Declaration

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

Sian Deborah Byrne

Acknowledgements

First and most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisor and comrade, Prof. van der Walt for all his valuable help and incredibly hard work and effort – over the course of this report and beyond. It is not an exaggeration to say that I would be where I am (personally, politically and academically) without his mentoring and support. Your commitment and integrity are truly rare. I would also like to thank my parents for their enormous contribution to my education. Thanks must also go to Prof. Bonner for his help in assisting me with contacts that would otherwise have been incredibly difficult to establish, and for his valuable insights. To the teams at Historical Papers and the Labour Research Service, appreciation must be extended for having me in their space for all those hours and for their important contribution to the preservation of history. Thanks also to my sister, Carrie, and friends, Joanna and Duca, for their assistance in getting this done. Lastly, thanks to my comrades in Zabalaza (and those outside it) for all the interesting discussion and debate.

Table of Contents

Title Pages.....	ii
Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	vii
PART I.....	1
Chapter 1	1
1. Introduction and Arguments.....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Setting the Scene: South Africa's turbulent 1970s and 1980s.....	2
1.3. The Union and the University Background	5
1.4. Locating the study	6
1.5. "Workerism" - a useful category?.....	7
1.6. Summary of Arguments	8
1.7. Rationale	13
1.8. Outline of the Report: Structure and Chapters.....	15
1.9. The Labour and the Left before Fosatu, Fosatu's Structure and Leadership	17
1.9.1. Background to the Formation of Fosatu	17
1.9.2. The Structure of Fosatu.....	28
1.9.3. The Subjects of the Research.....	29
Chapter 2	36
2. Literature and Methodology.....	36
2.1. Introduction.....	36
2.2. Literature Review.....	37
2.2.1. Introduction: the changing terrain and backdrop to debates.....	37
2.2.1.1. The "Registration Debate".....	39
2.2.1.2. The Debate over Legitimacy.....	40
2.2.1.3. The "Workerism-Populism Debate".....	41
2.2.2. Outline of the Literature.....	42
2.2.3. Heat and Light: How Useful are these Claims?.....	55
2.2.4. The Unions and the Academy.....	61
2.2.5. White and Black in Fosatu.....	63
2.2.6. Leadership versus Mass Base: the Iron Law of Oligarchy?.....	67
2.3. Literature Review Conclusion	72
2.4. Methodological Framework.....	73
2.5. Research Methods	73
2.5.1. Oral Testimony	75
2.5.1.1. Justification.....	75
2.5.1.2. Limitations	76
2.5.2. Documentary Evidence	78
2.5.2.1. Justification.....	78
2.5.2.2. Limitations	79
2.6. Sampling	80
2.7. Conclusion	82
Chapter 3	83
3. A Workerist Current?.....	83
3.1. Introduction.....	83

3.2.	Who were the workerists?	84
3.3.	Methodological Approaches to Identifying a Workerist Current	85
3.4.	Identifying a Workerist Current	87
3.5.	Tuacc, the Cape Motor Unions and the Various Union Traditions	88
3.5.1.	A Unique Organisational Approach: the “worker-control tradition”	88
3.5.2.	The Cape Motor Unions: “a sense of pragmatism and power”	89
3.5.3.	Distinguishing workerists from non-workerists	91
3.5.4.	The New Left, “A Radical Critique of Capitalism”, the Union versus the Vanguard	92
3.6.	Conclusion	95
Chapter 4		97
4.	Workerism, the New Left and Libertarian Socialism	97
4.1.	Introduction	97
4.2.	Context	98
4.2.1.	International Context: “deStalinisation” and libertarian socialism	98
4.2.2.	The South African Context	107
4.2.3.	The Arrival of New Left Ideas in South Africa	111
4.3.	Conclusion	116
PART II		117
Chapter 5		117
5.	Theoretical Framework of Workerism.....	117
5.1.	Introduction	117
5.1.1.	The New Left, Marxism, and Syndicalism	118
5.1.2.	Western Marxist Inspiration?	120
5.2.	Workerism as a South African New Left.....	126
5.2.1.	The New Left and Ideology	127
5.2.2.	Local assimilations, convergences and pragmatism	131
5.3.	Conclusion	132
Chapter 6		134
6.	Elements of Workerism: Theory and Analysis.....	134
6.1.	Introduction.....	134
6.2.	Apartheid and Capitalism.....	135
6.2.1.	The South African Revisionist Historians and CST theory	135
6.2.2.	Workerism and Stages of history	142
6.2.3.	Cultural Hegemony and Struggle.....	143
6.3.	Class, Race and Gender	144
6.3.1.	The Working Class	145
6.3.2.	The Ruling Class	149
6.3.3.	Race and Gender	151
6.4.	The State and Law.....	155
6.5.	Democracy, Anti-Vanguardism and “Trade Union Consciousness”	164
6.6.	“Politics” and “Economics”: beyond the “economism” caricature	168
6.7.	Identity, Culture, Consciousness and Ideology.....	174
6.8.	Nationalism, Populism and the ANC.....	175
6.9.	Internationalism	181
6.10.	Conclusion: “The Art of the Possible”	186
Chapter 7		188
7.	In the Short-term: Workerist Strategy and Tactics	188

7.1.	Introduction.....	188
7.2.	Aims and Objectives.....	190
7.3.	In the Short-Term.....	190
7.3.1.	The Centrality of Reforms.....	192
7.3.2.	Worker Control and the Role of White Intellectuals.....	194
7.3.3.	Open and Legal Unions.....	207
7.3.4.	Shop Floor Strength.....	211
7.3.5.	Strategic Organising.....	213
7.3.6.	Non-racialism.....	214
7.3.7.	National, Industrial Unions.....	217
7.3.8.	“Tight” Federation.....	220
7.3.9.	Developing Worker Leadership.....	222
7.3.10.	Trade Union Independence.....	223
7.4.	Conclusion.....	224
Chapter 8		226
8.	In the Long-Term: Quasi-Syndicalism or Social Democracy?.....	226
8.1.	Introduction.....	226
8.2.	Long-term Aims and Objectives of Workerism.....	229
8.3.	Quasi-Syndicalism or Social Democracy?.....	234
8.4.	Elements of Workerism.....	237
8.4.1.	Worker Control vs. Worker Self Management.....	237
8.4.2.	Consciousness, Counter-Culture and Counter-Hegemony.....	253
8.4.2.1.	Culture.....	256
8.4.2.2.	Popular Education.....	260
8.4.2.3.	“Organic Intellectuals”.....	261
8.4.3.	Counter-power vs. Co-determination.....	263
8.4.4.	Direct Action versus Legal Action.....	272
8.4.5.	The “Frontier of Control”: beyond the Sphere of Production.....	273
8.4.6.	Unions vs. Parties.....	277
8.4.7.	Alliances outside the Workplace.....	284
8.4.7.1.	The Question of the ANC, the UDF and the National Forum.....	285
8.4.7.2.	The Unemployed, Community and Social Movement Groups.....	289
8.4.8.	Reform vs. Revolution?.....	291
8.4.9.	Structure versus Agency.....	296
8.5.	Conclusion.....	299
Chapter 9		300
9.	Conclusion: The Definition and Decline of Workerism.....	300
9.1.	Defining Workerism.....	300
9.2.	The Decline of Workerism.....	303
9.2.1.	The Problem with a Politics of Pragmatism.....	306
9.2.2.	The Necessity of an Anarchist/Syndicalist Party.....	310
9.2.3.	Workerism and a Politics of “Engagement”.....	312
Reference List		316
	Primary Sources.....	316
	Secondary Sources.....	325

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAUD-E	German Workers Union Unitary-Organisation
AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers Union
ANC	African National Congress
ARM	Armed Resistance Movement
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BC (BCM)	Black Consciousness (Movement)
CAS	Central Administrative Services
CC	Central Committee
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration
CCOBTU	Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions
CIWW	Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand
COPE	Congress of the People
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CNT-FAI	National Confederation of Labour - Iberian Anarchist Federation
CST	Colonialism of a Special Type
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
EAWU	Engineering and Allied Workers Union
ERAPO	East Rand People's Organisation
EXCO	Executive Committee
FAUD	Free Workers' Union of Germany
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FEW	Fosatu Education Workshop
FOFATUSA	Federation of Free Trade Unions of South Africa
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GAWU	General and Allied Workers Union
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund
GWU	General Workers Union
GWUSA	General Workers Union of South Africa
IAS	Industrial Aid Society
IC	Industrial Council
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IIE	Institute for Industrial Education
IKD	Communists of Germany
IMF	International Metalworkers Federation
IST	Industrial Strategy Project
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JGU	Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union
KAPD	Communist Workers' Party of Germany
KSČ	Czechoslovakian Communist Party
LACOM	Labour and Community Education Project
LRA	Labour Relations Act

MACWUSA	Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa
MAWU-Tvl	MAWU Transvaal Branch
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MERG	Macroeconomic Research Group
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NEUM	Non European Unity Movement
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania
PCE	Communist Party of Spain
PCF	Communist Party of France
PCI	Communist Party of Italy
PEBCO	Port Elizabeth Civic Organisation
PWAWU	Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
SACHED	South African Committee for Higher Education Trust
SACOS	South African Council of Sports
SACP	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SACTU	South African Council of Trade Unions
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SASO	South African Students Organisation
SATAWU	South African Transport and Allied Workers Union
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
SFAWU	Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SNCC	Students Non Violent Coordinating Committee
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSC	Shop Stewards Council
SWOP	Society, Work and Development Institute
TGWU (T&G)	Transport and General Workers Union
TUACC	Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Committee
TUCSA	Trade Union Congress of South Africa
TWP	TUACC Workers' Project
TWIU	Textile Workers' Industrial Union
UAW	United Automobile Workers Union
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMMAWUSA	United Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of South Africa
UTP	Urban Training Project
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising
WOSA	Workers Organisation for Socialist Action

WPMAWU
WPWAB

Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union
Western Province Workers Advice Bureau

PART I

Chapter 1

1. Introduction and Arguments



Figure 1. Fosatu's launch in Hammanskraal in 1979. Fosatu Archives, AH2680/A40

1.1. Introduction

This report is concerned with elaborating the politics of an influential and multiracial “workerist” political tradition associated with the leadership of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu). Fosatu was the country’s most important trade union federation from its founding in 1979, until its 1985 when it merged into the new Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). If “workerism” was exemplified by Fosatu, its roots lay to some extent in the earlier union initiatives of the 1970s, notably the notably the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (Tuacc).

At its formation Fosatu claimed a membership of 45 000 in eleven unions, registered and unregistered.¹ By 1981, Fosatu’s membership had soared to 95 000,² and by the end of 1984, Fosatu claimed a membership of 120 000.³ Fosatu was also “one of the central advocates of building broad unity among the emerging unions” and “helped engineer the creation of the

¹ Friedman, M. 2011. *‘The Future is in the Hands of the Workers’: A History of Fosatu*. Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust: Johannesburg

² G. Adler and E. Webster, 1995. “Challenging Transition Theory: The Labour Movement, Radical Reform, and Transition to Democracy in South Africa” in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 80

³ Lacom. No date. *Freedom From Below: the Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa*. Sached: Durban

‘super-federation’”, Cosatu, the “largest trade union centre in South African history”,⁴ which claimed more than 1.2 million members at its formation just six years later.⁵

“Workerism’s” relatively brief period of activity (of less than two decades) holds decisive significance in South African history. “Workerism” was at least as important as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) as an anti-apartheid force by the early 1980s, and, like the BCM, overshadowed the African National Congress (ANC or “Congress”) at the time. Yet its very existence has almost entirely been written out popular constructions of the South African past. It is also significant for its innovative and unique left-wing politics, and conversely, for the fact that these politics remain masked behind accounts that have thus far failed to adequately grasp its real character. This is partly because much of the literature on the subject is polemical in its approach, deploying the term “workerist” as a crude label rather than developing it as a useful analytical category.

This report therefore seeks to redefine it by reference to what those labelled workerist actually stood for – through an analysis of their own words and other primary sources – as opposed to what has been imposed on them, both by existing secondary sources and by polemics. The analysis presented here demonstrates the need for a fundamental reassessment of workerism, and so, has major implications for the historiography of the 1970s and 1980s anti-apartheid struggles. It also suggests that a revival of discussions over the so-called “workerist-populist” debate, which pitted “workerists” against “populist” supporters of the ANC and SACP, could offer important insights and lessons for those seeking answers today.

1.2. Setting the Scene: South Africa’s turbulent 1970s and 1980s

In January 1973, two thousand black workers went on a wildcat strike in Durban. They downed tools and walked out of the Coronation Brick and Tile Company, demanding higher wages. This event shattered a period of almost ten years of near-silence on the part of the popular classes. “The strike wave rolled from factory to factory, with workers pouring out onto the streets, mounting mass pickets, and climbing onto roofs”,⁶ shouting “Filimuntu

⁴ Lacom, *Freedom from Below*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ D. Hemson, M. Legassick and N. Ulrich. 2006. “White Activists and the Revival of the Workers’ Movement” in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Vol. 2, 1970-1980*. Unisa Press: Johannesburg, p. 254

ufesadikiza” (“man is dead but his spirit still lives”).⁷ By the end of March the same year, the strike wave had spread to two other important industrial centres, the complexes of Pinetown-New Germany and Jacobs-Mobeni, and affected large regions in the province of Natal, involving over sixty one thousand black (mostly African but some Indian) workers in stoppages.⁸

The demand for higher wages was linked to rapidly rising inflation, which reflected a global economic crisis. By the early 1970s, the long post-war economic boom in the so-called “West” ground to a halt. A severe decline in the demand for South African raw materials, notably in agriculture from the late 1960s, threw many out of work. Manufacturing (which had by the 1970s become the largest sector) stagnated, exacerbating the unemployment problem. Declining gold revenues and increased oil prices after the 1973 oil shock interacted with deep structural problems in the South African economy (notably skills shortages, small, saturated markets), to drive the once booming South African economy into decline⁹ – effectively ending the labour shortages of the 1960s. Increasing prices, plus massive urbanisation, coupled with housing shortages and high levels of unemployment, created a situation that for many was untenable.

In the wake of the economic crisis, the Durban strikes of 1973 and the 1976 student revolts, classic apartheid (which had reached its pinnacle with the 1960s drive to create independent “black homelands”) unravelled. A whole series of reforms were introduced. Black worker organisations multiplied and grew in strength, spurred on by their new legal status under the provisions of the Wiehahn Commission of 1979.¹⁰

This was also a period of ideological ferment. The ANC had been banned in 1960, along with the breakaway Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), followed by other formations. The South African Communist Party (SACP), the underground successor to the Communist Party

⁷ Ginsberg, M. 1997. “Trade Union Education: its past and future role in the development of the South African labour movement”. Masters Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 67

⁸ Ulrich, N. 2003. “The Origins of the Fosatu: The Emergence of Trade Unions in Natal and the Development of a New Trade Union Tradition”. Unpublished Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, available at <<http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/PDF%20Files/wirs%20-%20Ulrich.PDF>>; Hemson et al., “White Activists”

⁹ Kemp, T. 1999. *Historical Patterns of Industrialization*. Longman: London

¹⁰ In the late 1970s, as part of the reform process, the apartheid state commissioned Nic Wiehahn to compile a report that would later pave the way for sweeping changes to the existing industrial relations infrastructure. The first interim report was tabled on May 1st 1979, which suggested essentially that black trade unions be given equal legal status, and thereby access to the official state-sanctioned industrial bargaining structures.

of South Africa (CPSA, banned 1950) was, like the ANC and PAC, in the early 1970s, a weak and marginal formation, operating largely from exile.

The space was taken by new currents. On the one hand, the BCM became the key black nationalist current. On the other hand, socialist ideas were also moving beyond the dominant local CPSA/SACP and Trotskyist traditions. Students at the University of Natal crowded into lecture halls to listen to radical lecturer Rick Turner, keenly aware that what they were discussing, and what they themselves were part of, was an ideological revolution that went much further than the confines of their classroom walls. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), denim-clad students attended multi-racial music festivals in a highly racialised society, or participated in paradigm-shifting explorations of South African and African history influenced by the work of E.P. Thompson and other British scholars. All of them were convinced that they “were involved in a decisive rupture with the past”.¹¹

These interlocking transformations, straddling the economic, cultural and political spheres, were part of a bigger process of change sweeping South Africa – itself located within a wider, global transitional processes. The crushing of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the injustice of the Vietnam War set the context for a break with official Communist Parties and the effusion of alternatives fashioned by disillusioned communists, anarchists and other leftists. This culminated in the emergence of the New Left,¹² a broad church bringing together a range of left political currents, including various form of Marxism (here Western Marxism, Maoism, Trotskyism, orthodox Marxism-Leninism and council communism are cited as important), as well as non-Marxist currents like anarchism its variant syndicalism, and other forms like social democracy. All of these, as shall be demonstrated, exerted their direct influence on workerism.

If the heyday of the New Left in the West was the 1960s, its impact in South Africa largely began in the 1970s. Here, radical writers and students dismantled the old certainties of South African historiography, and looked to the new black workers’ movement as the main agent of transformation in South Africa. As left intellectuals and militant workers converged, “workerism” began to be born.

¹¹ B. Bozzoli and P. Delius. 1990. “Radical History and South African Society” in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7, p. 23

1.3. The Union and the University Background

It should be noted that all Fosatu leaders were workerists, although most were. Conversely, not all workerists were in Fosatu. Several other activists both connected and unconnected to Fosatu have also commonly been assigned the label. However, it is reasonable to examine workerism by reference to its best known figures, the federation's workerist leadership, and those closely associated with it, and as such this group forms the focus of this report. These individuals were drawn from diverse backgrounds, geographically, politically and racially,¹³ and all were influenced, in different degrees and combinations, by various currents and events described here: the upsurge of worker militancy, the 1976 student revolts, the ideological revolution and the new university radicalism, as well as the "acute repressiveness"¹⁴ of the South African political landscape.

Many of the key Fosatu workerist leaders and their associates were students or lecturers who had been profoundly influenced by the development of the New Left phenomenon – the climax of which was the Paris Spring of 1968. However, not all were academics. Many were black workers and trade unionists that came to Fosatu through the workers' struggle, and in so doing, brought with them a variety of traditions and practices from an assortment of worker and political organisations. In essence, this implies that Fosatu's workerist leadership was not a homogenous group, sharing entirely homogenous theoretical and strategic ideas and concerns, although marked continuities exist. Particularly this relates to the influence of the New Left, which was more direct and important with regards to the (mostly) white academic leadership than the black. However, as is discussed in chapter 3 (esp. 3.4), the various streams converged over time, mutually absorbing and sharing influences from one another. That is, while workerism drew on a range of traditions and sources, it was nonetheless also coherent; from the many component parts, something new and distinctive was created.

¹³ Throughout the duration of this research it has been highlighted that geographical considerations cannot be understood as separate to political ones, where geographical location has often had a formative and instrumental role to play in the development of ideas. This is not the central focus here, although attention is drawn to the spatial character of the ideas held by those under review.

¹⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

The examination undertaken here does so through the lens of the workerists sitting on Fosatu's Central Committee and Executive Committee, and those closely associated with these it. It does not deal in any substantive way with workerist groups or individuals uninvolved with, or separate to the Federation. It is also, conversely, an attempt to identify precisely who in Fosatu's leadership can be accurately described as being a workerist, and as such to develop a new, more rigorous and accurate definition of workerism.

1.4. Locating the study

Fosatu was a national structure and, as such, this research is necessarily national in its scope. The period in question begins in the late 1960s. This is the period in which small cracks began to appear in the seemingly unbreakable post-Sharpeville South African apartheid polity, culminating in the rise of Cosatu, a "giant",¹⁵ in 1985. This event marks the end of the period in question. This project was originally conceived to focus more narrowly on the period between 1979, from the formation of the Fosatu, and 1985, but the timeframe was extended to incorporate roughly a decade preceding 1979. Although this extends scope of the project considerably, it was unavoidable given the nature of the project – the central focus of which is the ideological and political positions of a group of trade unionists; these did not start with Fosatu's formation, but were shaped by earlier developments.

This decision to extend the period was thus taken in view of the fact that ideas that are the focus of this research can only be understood in their context. They were not formed in a vacuum, and were not static, nor even necessarily fully developed and articulated at any one point. Moreover, ideas cannot be understood in isolation from the histories in which they are produced, and the positions arrived at are the product of a long process of evolution and contestation, in which concepts and categories are remoulded and reformulated.

Many of the white leaders in Fosatu made their way into the trade unions from the universities, and were spurred on by the left-wing and socialist ideas of the New Left. Therefore, a brief discussion of the climate of the universities and the routes travelled by those (mainly white) academics that found themselves in Fosatu's leadership was necessary.

¹⁵ Cyril Ramaphosa, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) speaking at the inaugural Congress of Cosatu, cited in Baskin, J. 1991 *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg, p. 54

Likewise, many of the black leaders in Fosatu came through a first-hand experience of exploitation and union activism: the black worker intellectuals that came to be workerist leaders in Fosatu have histories that yield important information about the nature of workerism. Therefore, a discussion of the larger evolution of the local workers movement is also necessary.

It must be noted that political discussion and debate, particularly amongst university-based academics, was constrained in the Fosatu period by the imperatives of building the movement, and had thus been “far more intense when [they] were students and lecturers than when [they] were trade unionists”.¹⁶ Therefore, although the central focus remains the same – that is, to understand the “politics” of the workerist current within Fosatu – it is simultaneously an attempt to trace the lineage and evolution of those ideas, which requires some exploration of the years and organisations leading up to the formation of Fosatu, as well as of those in which the organisation formally existed.

1.5. “Workerism” - a useful category?

At this point, it is important to acknowledge the problematic nature of the terms workerist and workerism. These terms have their roots in the intense debates, often projected as a contest between workerism and “populism,” that raged within the labour movement and within the broader struggle for liberation in South Africa during the 1980s. The debate generally centred on the issue of trade union affiliation to the United Democratic Front (UDF), a loose coalition of anti-apartheid groups. The label workerist in this context usually referred to the unions (many of which were affiliated to Fosatu) that argued against affiliation to the UDF on the grounds of defending working class autonomy; “populists” were those arguing for affiliation in the interests of the broadest possible popular unity. Even this, it must be admitted, is an oversimplification of the complex issues at hand. As suggested by Ritchken, workerism (like “populism”) was used as a derogatory label in heated polemics,¹⁷ and potentially conceals far more about the workerist current than it reveals (an issue to which I will return below).¹⁸

¹⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁷ Two Trade Unionists. 1987. “Errors of Workerism: A Response” in *South African Labour Bulletin* (hereafter *South African Labour Bulletin*), Vol. 12, No. 3, March-April edn., p. 64-65

¹⁸ Ritchken, E. 1989. “Trade Unions and Community Organisations: Towards a working alliance?” in *Transformation*, No. 10

Because of this, I did consider the option of dropping the term “workerist” altogether – in favour of new, more rigorous and meaningful categories that more accurately capture the essence of the politics of the current. However, the concept “workerism” has been used so frequently in secondary literature, and has some pre-established meaning for those familiar with the debates – even if often incorrect. Therefore, I decided to use the term – initially in inverted commas to denote its problematic nature – until it was established that workerism did refer to a distinct political tendency. The term workerism *does* refer to a distinct political tendency, as I will show, albeit one with a number of internal tensions, and one that evolved over time. Simply changing the label would not alter the *content* of the ideas for which it stands, and it is that content in which I am interested. As such, I have decided to use but re-define the term by reference to what those labelled workerist actually stood for, through an analysis of their own words and other primary sources, as opposed to what has been imposed on them both by existing secondary sources and by polemics. Importantly, then, in using the term workerism I do not necessarily agree with some of the meanings that have been imposed in the existing literature, such as an identification of workerism with “economism” or “narrow trade union politics,” for example.

1.6. Summary of Arguments

I argue that although workerism cannot be said to constitute a homogenous ideology – if by that we mean a systematically articulated programme or organisational formation. However, the content of its ideas and practice were sufficiently coherent to denote the existence of a distinct political tendency. In the pages that follow, the use of inverted commas in reference to “workerism” will be abandoned to denote this.

This report identifies the core features embodied in workerism as follows:

- Influences derived by dissident forms of Marxism, and a rejection of SACP-style Marxism-Leninism, but also demonstrable influences from anarchism and its trade union wing, syndicalism; council communism and social democracy.
- A strict class analysis of South African society, and a concomitant rejection of “populist” and nationalist narratives, Afrikaner or African, that reduced the country’s history to one of racial struggle. This included an analysis of apartheid *as a form of capitalism*, and the

political conclusion that the final emancipation of the black working class required a radical social transformation, defeating *both* racial domination and capitalist exploitation.

- A quasi-syndicalist stress on *independent but politicised industrial trade unions in a tight federation* as the key agents of transformation. Workerism rejected alliances with the ANC and SACP, and stressed self-governed trade unions, based on strict “*workers control*” (effected through mandates and mass assemblies) in place of subordination to political parties.
- A rejection the racial exclusivity, including that of the BCM (which excluded whites) and PAC (which excluded whites and Indians), arguing for a class-based internationalism and “*non-racialism*” that united the working class against both apartheid and capitalism. Although closer then to ANC “non-racialism,” workerism rejected the ANC’s nationalist project of a cross-class coalition against apartheid.
- A *politics of “action” over “dogma,”* and of *eclecticism and pragmatism*. This enabled a dynamic approach to immediate issues and a willingness to be tactically flexible on the one hand, but on the other hand it generated a tendency to downplay long-term strategic planning. This was associated with the non-recognition of (or tendency to skirt over) significant tensions and ambivalences within workerist thought and politics. For example, workerism contained *both* social democratic and quasi-syndicalist strands, but the tensions between these were rarely acknowledged. This generated significant problems for the sustainability of the workerist project.
- Workerism was a deeply political, socialist project. It was not, apolitical or “economistic”, nor was it a form of Trotskyism, nor of “Western Marxism,” nor was it wedded to a programme of forming a new “workers party” – all simplifications and stereotypes in the literature. It had many quasi-syndicalist elements and anarchist and syndicalist influences, but it cannot be described as truly anarcho-syndicalist or revolutionary syndicalist, as other accounts would suggest.
- Workerism was the dominant current in Fosatu, a mass-based, almost entirely black union movement, with profoundly democratic and decentralised structures. It was not something applicable to a handful of white academics as certain sources have suggested; nor was workerism ever seriously rejected within the federation. It was, on the contrary, a mass black worker current, also embraced by most of the small number of radical whites who worked in Fosatu. The claim, by some writers, that workerism was not influential beyond a small clique of white intellectuals, is thus a caricature.

This definition may run contrary to perceptions of workerists themselves who in most cases overtly identified as Marxist-Leninists. However, this report does not make self-identification the basis for definition and therefore this fact is irrelevant. Rather, it extrapolates these core features from primary sources on workerism – including the words of workerists themselves.

A focus on primary sources is absolutely necessary; while workerism is widely acknowledged as an important current, it is a current that is not well understood. The literature that has examined the politics of workerism has generally failed to provide a serious account of its politics, being dominated by inconsistent and polemical accounts that present it in a wide variety of demonstrably contradictory, reductionist and inaccurate ways.¹⁹ . Sometimes workerism has often been reduced to a form of “Marxism”; a simplification and caricature that precludes a deeper exploration of its ideas and praxis. The literature therefore hinders the elaboration of a full understanding of the tendency by ignoring the full range of important ideological and historical influences, both from within and outside the Marxist canon, on workerism.

Although several scholars have noticed the influence of the New Left on workerism, the literature has rarely sufficiently explored this connection. Workerism was certainly a deeply South African phenomenon, displaying many unique and creative characteristics produced out of the particularities of apartheid South Africa, it cannot be divorced from a broader developments. The failure to explore the link with the New Left has thus tended to promote a literature that provides only rough sketches of the ideas and praxis to which the workerist current subscribed, and is marked by very little in-depth research.

Examining workerist materials exposes a wide range of interesting and important influences, many of which derived *directly* from the New Left connection. However, the New Left was a movement “not always aware of its own antecedents”.²⁰ as such it brought to bear on workerism a number of *indirect* influences, the most important of which should be located in a tradition of socialism that rejected the authoritarianism of Marxism and stressed anti-statism and workers’ self-management, through councils. Gramsci was an important source of this indirect influence, and his ideas were fundamentally shaped by Italian syndicalism –

¹⁹ See literature review for a fuller description.

²⁰ Gombin, R. 1978. *The Radical Tradition: a study in revolutionary thought*. Methuen and Co. Ltd.: Bristol, p. 12

even if this fact has been largely ignored. Through this and other connections, Fosatu, in many but not all respects, broke with classical Marxism and came to a quasi-syndicalist position. This can be detected upon examination of a number of core workerist characteristics: in its understanding of trade unions as inherently political; in its argument against the separation of politics and economics; in its rejection of political vanguardism as a necessary and essential component of political activities and in its view of unions as a, if not the, primary vehicle in the struggle for socialism. This co-existed, however, with a more social democratic strand, akin to Eurcommunism – likewise brought into workerism, I argue, via its link to the New Left.

Workerists thus developed a distinctive set of ideas and a particular attitude to the relationship between theory and practice that cannot be sufficiently grasped unless in relation to praxis of the New Left. Although not politically homogenous, a deep thread ran through the New Left that prioritised “action” over theory, and offered a more open and flexible politics not possible under the “Old Left” (which, it was argued, centred on the “correct” and “scientific” line as propounded by the party.)

Like the mainstream New Left, workerism was eclectic and pragmatic, drawing theoretical insights haphazardly from various theoretical doctrines, including (but not solely) from Marxism. This was expressed in theoretical contradictions and the occasional disjuncture between theory and practice; in a willingness on the part of workerists to dismiss accepted notions where they didn’t fit, and in a readiness to ignore the supposed limitations these notions imposed on practice – all of which resulted, in practical terms, in a free flowing tactical flexibility. This praxis was described by Adler as “*par excellence*, the art of the possible”.²¹

Strategically, this approach led workerists to consciously subordinate questions over long-term strategy and the formulation of a cohesive political programme to short-term demands and “spontaneous” action. This meant that Fosatu’s workerists had no clear long-term strategic plan in place for achieving its radical ends (the abolition of capitalism and the national liberation of the black working class majority). This strategic deficiency (typical in the New Left) imparted inconsistencies and contradictions on what longer term strategic

²¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

thinking did exist in workerism, expressed in ambivalent actions which were at once libertarian and more statist, revolutionary and reformist, spontaneous and premeditated, “boycottist” and “engagist”. At the same time, Fosatu made decisions – notably the refusal to affiliate to the broad United Democratic Front (UDF, formed 1983) – that were at odds with established workerist approaches and thinking.

Workerism thus vacillated between two tendencies: the first akin to social democracy and resembling (in certain respects) Eurocommunism, the second being quasi-syndicalist in character. Concretely this meant that Fosatu straddled a conception of social change as happening from within the institutions of the state, which necessitated *participation* and *engagement* in those structures (consistent with social democracy), and a conception that stressed abstentionism and the building of worker power outside and against the state (consistent with syndicalism). Although workerism displayed important aspects of the latter, the former predominated in key respects, laying the basis for a distinct “politics of engagement” with the state, courts, and statutory industrial relations systems that would, I argue, later have important consequences for the longevity of the workerist project.

By the 1990s, workerism had all but disappeared. While the “politics of pragmatism” so central to workerism was the source of much of Fosatu’s success in the 1980s – it was also a strategic weakness, one that plagued the New Left elsewhere and was transposed onto the South African political landscape. Their “action first, doctrine later”²² approach to politics and political struggle led workerists to neglect the task of formulating a sufficiently coherent theory of society and a corresponding political programme adequate to sustain their vision of a non-racial democratic and socialist South Africa. This was exacerbated by the fact that workerists, while appreciating the centrality of the “battle of ideas”, failed to fully appreciate the necessity for an organisation intended specifically with the active promulgation of those (workerist) ideas within the broader union body in order to win that battle.

The failure of the New Left-inspired faith in spontaneous activity was evident: workerism left a strategic vacuum into which the SACP and ANC were more than willing to step. Moreover, in the context of the resurgence of mass struggle, without a clear conception of its objectives and the means necessary to achieve them (a workable and consistent political programme and

²² Genovese, E. 1971: *In Red and Black: Marxian explorations in Southern and Afro-American history*. Pantheon Books: New York, p. 17

a specific organisation to ensure its implementation being key), workerism was simply derailed as the tempo of mass struggle escalated and the sentiment of liberation spread. Their “politics of engagement”, pragmatism, legalism and negotiating approach laid the basis for South Africa’s negotiated transition and its corporatism. Arguably, the current Cosatu approach of “radical reform” can be traced back to this too – although there is a definite break as well.

1.7. Rationale

Fosatu was at the time, as noted, the most important union federation in South Africa. Alongside the UDF, it was arguably the largest anti-establishment organisation based in the African working class in the early 1980s, and the “workerist-populist” debate was an event of decisive importance in the anti-apartheid and labour movements. As Friedman notes, the debate “did not involve merely a difference about union tactics”, but was a struggle between two currents with “two very different political strategies, battling it out... for the leadership of the liberation movement”.²³

Yet despite the significance and controversial nature of the “workerist-populist” debate in the South African historical landscape, the important contribution that the workerists made to the liberation struggle, and the implications of their positions for the labour movement today, the workerists have been largely overlooked. Existing literature, without providing a clear outline of workerism, has generally portrayed the workerists in contradictory and inconsistent ways that hinder rather than enable a clearer understanding. As I will show in chapter 2, these portrayals refer to everything from “economism”, to “syndicalism”, to Trotskyism, to advocacy of a reformist labour party. Academic work on workerism is also very limited – something that is true of academic work on South African labour history as a whole. Until just before the completion of this project, with the publication of Michelle Friedman’s *“The Future is in the Hands of the Workers”: A history of Fosatu*, in 2011, no general history of the federation even existed, and most of its affiliates still remain unexamined. Friedman’s book provides wonderfully illustrated overview, but is a popular rather than a scholarly account, schematic rather than analytical. Where Fosatu features, it is usually written about

²³ Friedman cited in Dwyer, P. 2009. “South Africa under the ANC: Still Bound to the Chains of Exploitation” in in Zeilig (ed.). *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*, Haymarket Books: Chicago, pp. 203-204

not in its own right but simply as the precursor to Cosatu,²⁴ and it is never the central focus of the study.²⁵

In addition, it is often said that history tends to be distorted by current events – and the present often read onto the past. This is the case with many popular accounts and perceptions of the South African anti-apartheid struggle, which has increasingly been presented as identical with the history of the ANC (the dominant force in the national liberation struggle in the latter 1980²⁶ and is today South Africa’s ruling party). But ANC influence was never consistently dominant in the struggle; the ANC was often a second tier player, including for much of the period before the late 1940s, and again, from the late 1960s. For much of the 1970s the Black Consciousness (BC) tradition was “by and large, the dominant force” amongst the nationalists, although it was “a very disparate and disorganised movement”.²⁷

Workerism (the politics of Fosatu, a mass movement sharply critical of the ANC) was the other major alternative to an ANC that was weak and struggling to re-establish a presence in the country. (The BCM was of crucial importance to the development of the workerist tradition, both directly and indirectly, as shown later). Despite some recent claims, the underground ANC played only a limited role in Fosatu and its predecessors, notably the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (Tuacc), and many ANC activists in these bodies in any case acted independently of ANC instructions.²⁸

A closer investigation of the period reveals a much more complex and colourful picture in which a variety of social forces and ideologies emerge. Forces like workerism and BC, at least for most of the crucial period of the 1970s and 1980s, often relegated the ANC to the shadows. This project is therefore partly an attempt to recover some of South Africa’s “lost” history, and, concurrently, to reinvigorate accounts that seem increasingly dominated by the

²⁴ See Kraak, G. 1992. *Breaking the Chains: Labour in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s*. University of Michigan Press: United States; Baskin, *Striking Back*; Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970 – 1984*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg

²⁵ Forrest, K. 2007. “Power, Independence and Worker Democracy in the Development of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) and its Predecessors”. PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand

²⁶ Supporters of the ANC have at times been called “Charterists” because of their identification with the ANC’s 1955 “Freedom Charter”.

²⁷ Callinicos, A. 1992. *Between apartheid and Capitalism*. Cox and Wyman Limited: England, p. 80

²⁸ Legassick, M. 2008. “Debating the revival of the workers’ movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and post-apartheid patriotic history” in *Kronos* Vol. 34, No. 1

triumphalist ANC narratives. It is, in this sense, also a recovery of important elements of anti-capitalist, black and working class history.

This report aims then, not only to provide an important addition to research on labour and left history, but also to increase our understanding of Fosatu and the anti-apartheid struggle in general – and the struggle as it was fought by black workers more specifically. Revisiting workerism also provides an important corrective to certain contemporary constructions of the South African past.

1.8. **Outline of the Report: Structure and Chapters**

This Thesis is divided into two parts. **Part 1**, containing chapters 1 through 4, provides the backdrop for understanding workerism. Within Part 1, **the current chapter** introduces the topic of workerism and provides justification for the importance and relevance of the project. It likewise provides an overview of the central arguments presented in following chapters, whilst contextualising Fosatu and the emergence of the workerist within the South African and international context, with specific reference to the history of black and non-racial trade unionism and of left and nationalist politics. The respondents in this study are also discussed.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on workerism – highlighting its contradictory, polemical and incomplete nature as justification for the relevance of this study on workerism. It also outlines the research methodologies used, looking specifically at the strengths and weakness of oral testimony and documentary analysis – the two key methodologies in this study.

Chapter 3 assesses the extent to which workerism can be considered a current at all, outlining the approach taken in making this assessment and concluding (partly by tracing the evolution of the workerist current from its beginnings) that workerism *was* a distinct tendency – being sufficiently internally coherent and distinctive for this argument to hold. Through this, the chapter introduces the idea was workerism was fundamentally linked to the New Left, but adds that it was not simply a carbon copy. **Chapter 4** comprises a discussion of the rise of the New Left in South Africa, set against its emergence elsewhere. The intensely repressive and censored climate of the South African political landscape in the period is highlighted as a means to explain its delayed and fragmentary assimilation.

Part 2 of this thesis begins the concrete elaboration of the politics of workerism – the central concern of this report. Part 2 consists of Chapters 5 through 8, which deal specifically with workerist theory, strategy and tactics. **Chapter 5** deals with the theoretical framework within which workerism should be located. It evaluates arguments elsewhere, through which the claim is made that workerism is often narrowly equated with Marxism, where it should in fact be situated within the more eclectic framework of the New Left.

Chapter 6 goes on to unpack the core theoretical elements of workerism, by looking at concrete issues such as the workerist thinking on issues of, for example, class, race, gender, the state, capitalism, the role of unions and parties, including Marxist vanguardism, as well as workerist assessments of nationalism and nationalist movements like the ANC. In so doing it highlights the similarities between the approach to theory taken by workerists with that of the international New Left, emphasising the pragmatism and the rather hostile attitude to questions of theory common to both. It demonstrates some of the consequences of this approach, notably contradictions in theory and disjunctures and inconsistencies in the application of theory to practice, all of which, it is argued, were typical of – rather than anomalous in – the New Left.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 deal with the details of workerist strategy, the former looking at its core short-term approach, and the latter with its longer-term aspirations and programmes. In **Chapter 7** it is argued that workerism developed a fairly effective short-term strategy, designed to enable the federation to resist repression on the one hand, and withstand it on the other – the lessons for which were often drawn from the failures of Fosatu's predecessors, notably the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). For these ends, workerists developed a strategy combining non-racial, national, industrial and strategically-placed unions, organised into a "tight federation" which pooled resources and shared policies. Workerists argued that strong organisation was the basis for – and was reinforced by – successful struggles for immediate gains by members intimately involved in an identifying with the union as their own, which was necessarily facilitated by autonomous, democratic, worker controlled and open, legal unionism.

Chapter 8 discusses the long-term workerist project. Through an analysis of its core elements, the argument is advanced that workerism lacked a coherent long-term political

programme rooted in a clearly articulated set of principles – again, at least partly a product of its location within the New Left. This led to the conscious subordination of questions of long-term strategising and planning to short-term programmatic demands and “spontaneous action”. In so doing the chapter highlights that workerism vacillated between a more cautious strategy akin to social democracy centred on engagement and participation in institutions of state/capitalism, and a more radical quasi-syndicalist programme which stressed abstentionism and autonomy. **Chapter 9** concludes the report by reflecting on arguments made previously, and uses these to make some initial interpretations about the decline of workerism.

1.9. The Labour and the Left before Fosatu, Fosatu’s Structure and Leadership

1.9.1. Background to the Formation of Fosatu

South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, while being remembered as a time of massive economic growth and industrial expansion, was also a period of intense political repression and censorship. In 1953, the apartheid government set up a racially segregated industrial relations framework for Africans, and in 1956 introduced legislation to deny registration to racially mixed unions. According to Ulrich and van der Walt, by the 1960s “apartheid had made interracial unionism almost impossible”,²⁹ and in line with the 1953 Labour Settlement of Disputes Act, Coloured and Indian unions were organised into “parallel” or “sweetheart” unions dominated and controlled by their white counterparts. Africans were excluded. For much of the period of this study, the Trade Union Council of South Africa (Tucsa) exemplified this style of unionism.

Sactu was an important dissident federation, led by the ANC (and the SACP), and like the ANC and SACP, turned to armed struggle in the early 1960s. Formed in 1953, the SACP was allied to the ANC on the basis of the so-called “two-stage” theory: the immediate struggle in South Africa was “national democratic” in that it was for a black-majority-rule, independent

²⁹ Cooper, D. 1991. “Locating South Africa in the Third World: Comparative perspectives on patterns of industrialisation and political trade unionism in South America and South Africa” in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 17, No. 2; Ulrich, N and L. Van Der Walt. 2009. “South Africa, labour movement” in Ness, I (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of Revolution and Protest*. Blackwell Publishing: United States, p. 3094

capitalist South Africa by a cross-class nationalist movement; socialism was relegated to a second stage, to emerge at some unspecified future point.³⁰

Since the first stage was (the SACP insisted) to be led by the ANC and its allies, it followed that the SACP must throw its efforts into strengthening the ANC.³¹ As a result the ANC and SACP enjoyed a close relationship with an overlapping leadership, around the common goal of “national democracy” through a broad nationalist front. The question that remained, however, was the means through which this nationalist front would seize state power. In the 1950s, the ANC and SACP, working closely with Sactu and other bodies, stressed mass civil disobedience. High levels of repression, however, began to convince many leaders that something more drastic was needed. In 1950, the CPSA (reformed underground in 1953 as the SACP), and the Suppression of Communism Act was used throughout the 1950s against opponents of apartheid.

In early 1960, following violent repression at Sharpeville and Langa, the ANC and the PAC were also banned, followed by other formations. Subsequently, the ANC and SACP (as well as the PAC) declared armed struggle as the only means to defeat apartheid; this was backed up by ANC/SACP theses that apartheid was “fascist”,³² making open political activity impossible. Sactu was not banned, but its new orientation – recruitment of guerrilla cadre for the underground – meant its leadership was heavily repressed, while its union activities withered away.

This shift to armed struggle, combined with heavy repression, saw the collapse of the Sactu as a union.³³ Combined with the dissolution of the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa (Fofatusa) into Tucsa (and its subsequent expulsion of Africans), this signalled an abrupt nadir in African working class organisation in the South Africa.³⁴ The registered unions representing Coloured, Indian and White workers now “vastly

³⁰ See SACP. [1962] 1981. “The Road to South African Freedom” in Bunting, B. (ed.). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the history of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980*. Inkululeko Publishers: London

³¹ See Everatt, D. 1991. “Alliance Politics of a Special Type: the roots of the ANC/SACP alliance, 1950-54” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 19-39

³² For example, SACP. [1962] 1981. “The Road to South African Freedom,” in Bunting, B (ed.), *South African Communists Speak: documents from the history of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980*, London: Inkululeko Publishers

³³ Ulrich and van der Walt, “South Africa, labour movement”

³⁴ Bonner, P. 1979 “Focus on Fosatu” in *South African Labour Bulletin*. Vol.5, No.1.May edn.; Ulrich and Van Der Walt, *op. cit.*

overshadowed” African unionism.³⁵ Despite noteworthy exceptions in which trade unions and their leading activists fought to bridge the racial gap,³⁶ for a variety of complex reasons (notably the existence of prejudicial legislation), the South African labour landscape has been plagued by a situation of separate organisation for black and white workers.

While it is commonly recognised that “Durban was the real centre”³⁷ of worker activity during the decade of the 1970s, workers in other parts of the country (allied with students) were simultaneously undergoing the process of organising black trade unions. One of the first efforts to re-organise African workers was initiated in Durban in response to the 1969 dockworkers’ strike for higher wages (involving an estimated one thousand workers). Despite the fact that the struggle was lost, it provided the impetus for the establishment of “Wages Commissions” in 1971 at the Durban and Pietermaritzburg campuses of the University of Natal. These structures were initiated by a small group of radical white students and lecturers,³⁸ many of whom were involved with the National Union of South African Students (Nusas), and some of whom would later take up important positions in Fosatu.

With the Paris Spring still fresh in memory, they were excited by recent events in the international student milieu, and were influenced by ideas circulating in the New Left.³⁹ They were eager to foster the formation of a non-racial worker movement in South Africa, partly as a consequence of the 1969 breakaway from Nusas by black student leaders and the subsequent formation of the South African Students Organisation (Saso) – which rallied around BC ideas and explicitly excluded whites. The Commissions soon spread to other English speaking campuses, including the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Wits.

³⁵ Ulrich and Van Der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 3095

³⁶ The first trade union committed to organising black workers was the syndicalist Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) of the 1910s, and, like the syndicalist tradition of which it was part, aspired to interracial unionism (See van der Walt, L. and M. Schmidt. 2007. *Black Flame: the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*. AK Press: Edinburgh, pp. 165-166; also van der Walt, LJW. 2007. “Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904-1921: Rethinking the history of labour and the left”. PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand; Hirsch, S. and L. van der Walt. 2010. *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-194*. Brill: Leiden. Later this task was undertaken quite successfully by the South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC), and by Sactu in the 1950s (See Ulrich, “The Origins”). Two thirds of SATLC’s 168 432 members by 1946 were in racially mixed unions, although some of these had segregated structures. (See Alexander, P. 2000. *Workers, War and the Origins of apartheid: Labour and Politics in South Africa, 1939-48*. Ohio University Press: United States, pp. 84-5). Sactu never had more than 50,000 members, mainly African.

³⁷ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

³⁸ See Davie, G. 2007. “Strength in Numbers: The Durban Student Wages Commission, Dockworkers and the Poverty Datum Line, 1971-1973” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2

³⁹ Refer to Chapter 4

Attempts to revive Sactu (which had strong ties in exile to the banned ANC and SACP) inside South Africa were inhibited by resource constraints and police interference. Thus a number of ex-Sactu activists contacted the Wages Commissions and played a role in the formation of the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) in 1971, an important step in the revival of non-racial unionism. However, contrary to some subsequent claims,⁴⁰ Sactu was far from the decisive force in these initiatives; these efforts drew in a range of currents, many of which were overtly critical of the ANC, and if Sactu was a factor, it was very far from dominant.⁴¹

The issue of the form that worker organisation should take was contested within the Commissions (and the GFWBF), with some students arguing for worker committees instead of unions, and others arguing for unions based on democratic structures and accountable leadership to counteract bureaucratic tendencies.⁴² The Wages Commissions developed two strategies for building worker organisation. Firstly, with the help of Harriet Bolton, who was involved with Tucsa, the Commissions resolved to “use the more progressive Tucsa affiliates as a cover under which to organise”.⁴³ As part of this, Dave Hemson and Rob Lambert – both radical white intellectuals – took up positions in registered Tucsa unions.

Secondly, the Commissions undertook to research and inform workers about upcoming Wage Board determinations: the Wage Boards were part of the statutory industrial relations system, and could set minimum wages for sectors, often applicable to non-unionised workers and Africans. Several public meetings were held in Durban to discuss wage demands. At one such meeting in 1971, it was suggested by workers that a funeral fund be set up with an eye towards the formation of a trade union. This gave rise to the GFWBF (the “Fund”), which undertook educational work, and ran a complaints service. However, the primary, longer-term aim of the Fund revolved around “using the Benefit Fund as a stepping stone to trade unionism proper, hiving off sections of its members into industrial unions when sufficient

⁴⁰ Sithole, J. and Ndlovu, S. 2006 “The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980” in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy Vol. 2, 1970-1980*, Unisa Press: Johannesburg. For a more accurate account, see Hemson et al, “White activists”. For a devastating critique of attempts to paint the 1970s non-racial unions as basically Sactu initiatives, see Legassick, “Debating the revival”. For a partial response, see Sithole, J. 2009.

“Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: a response to Legassick on the workers’ movement” in *Kronos*, Vol. 35, No. 1

⁴¹ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”

⁴² Ulrich, N. 2007. “Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers’ control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (Tuacc), 1970-1979”, Masters Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand

⁴³ Ulrich, “The origins”, p. 8

membership in that particular sector had been achieved”.⁴⁴ In an attempt to co-ordinate activities and to draw in registered trade unions, the GFWBF also initiated the Central Administrative Service (CAS), which subsequently incorporated registered Tucsa unions, including the Garment, Furniture and Textile unions, as well as the Motor Assemblies Unions, and the Wages Commissions.

The GFWBF was keen on establishing links with other labour-oriented organisations, one of which was the Urban Training Project (UTP), a body “formed in Johannesburg to assist organisation of unregistered unions”.⁴⁵ These unions were “loosely linked” as the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU).⁴⁶ The UTP was formed in 1970 by students, who included Eric Tyacke and Loet Douwes-Deker,⁴⁷ and by activists from Tucsa’s defunct African Affairs section.⁴⁸ Thus, in sharp contrast to the non-racial positions of the Durban-based unions and GFWBF, the UTP was influenced by “separatist ideologies such as the PAC-style exclusivist Africanism and the BC movement, and barred whites from leadership positions”.⁴⁹ Later, in 1980, the CCOBTU set up the Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa), a BC-oriented national federation comprising about 30 000 members, which stressed black-only leadership, and which had links to the UTP. Nevertheless, a UTP member was invited to assist in running seminars with the GFWBF, and the organisation was represented on the CAS. Most of the UTP unions were formed in 1972, in the wake of the Putco Drivers’ strike in Johannesburg.

Following these early attempts at organisation, the process surged forward in 1973, as workers were radicalised and organisation was galvanised by the Durban strikes. The strikes provided the impetus for the formation of the first branch of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) the same year, one of the first independent (as opposed to parallel) unions, and a body that would play a decisive role in Fosatu later. After Mawu, several new independent unions were established, including the National Union of Textile Workers

⁴⁴ Historical Papers (hereafter HP): AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.18. Lecture delivered by Philip Bonner to the inaugural Congress of Fosatu: The history of Labour Organisation in South Africa

⁴⁵ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.18. Miscellaneous, document titled “Timeline”, p. 2

⁴⁶ Van Der Walt and Ulrich, “South Africa, Labour Movement”, p. 3095

⁴⁷ Hemson *et al*, “White Activists”

⁴⁸ Ulrich and Van Der Walt, “South Africa, Labour Movement”; Ulrich, “The Origins”

⁴⁹ Ulrich and Van Der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 3095; See also Lowry, D. 1999. *Twenty Years in the Labour Movement: the Urban Training Project in South Africa, 1971-1991*. Wadmore: Johannesburg

(NUTW), the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).⁵⁰

However, the impact of the strikes was not only felt in the formation of new unions. In May 1973, just as the strikes subsided, the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) was formed, primarily at the behest of Richard Turner (deeply influenced by events in France in 1968, where he had recently completed his PhD on Sartre), and his wife Fozia Fischer. Its primary objective was a broad socialist-inspired worker education, introducing broad topics and concepts in the fields of political economy, history and philosophy, and some training. Shop steward training was a focus largely due to the influence of the rank-and-file British shop stewards' movement, at its peak during the period, on key IIE leaders.⁵¹

This was set up as a correspondence college, largely in response to the limitations imposed on black education under the Bantu Education Act of 1953, but modelled on the famed London Correspondence Society of the early nineteenth century.⁵² The reason for this was as follows: "if you look at a book like *The Making of the English Working Class*, you see that the origin of British worker organisation really arose through correspondence societies".⁵³ Although the IIE and the GFWBF worked closely together, there was friction over the relationship of the IIE to the unions, as well as over the IIE's relationship to African chiefs. "Traditional leaders" were an integral part of the apartheid system, yet had a degree of autonomy as well as of legitimacy for many Africans. Particularly contentious was the link to powerful KwaZulu homeland leader Chief Buthelezi, who sometimes posed as an anti-apartheid figure, causing some bitter splits in years to come.⁵⁴ The *South African Labour Bulletin* was also set up in 1974, and survives today.

The apartheid government's response to the Durban strikes was to attempt to curb the formation of the new workers movement by enacting new legislation that would provide channels of communication between management and African workers. As part of the revision of the Settlement of Disputes Act (then renamed the Bantu Labour Relations Act), liaison committees (comprising management and workers), and works committees (in the

⁵⁰ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.18. Miscellaneous, document titled "Timeline", p. 2

⁵¹ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ *ibid*; Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

absence of liaison committees) were promoted in order to re-establish industrial peace, while sidelining unregistered unions. The UTP now came into conflict with the GFWBF over these new structures, the latter arguing that they served to co-opt workers, and promoted collaboration with management and government, and the former, and some in the Western Province Workers Advisory Bureau (WPWAB), arguing that they could be used to the benefit of workers.⁵⁵ Tensions came to a climax and the CAS began to collapse over the issue of supporting the new, unregistered unions.⁵⁶

As a result of this (and with an urgent need for a coordinating body that could replace the CAS), Mawu, the NUTW, the GFWBF and the IIE came together to form the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (Tuacc). Tuacc laid the foundation for Fosatu: according to Ulrich, Fosatu's distinctive organisational style and policies, which included establishing structures that promoted direct "worker control", "open" unionism and "tight" federation, in which resources were pooled and affiliates adhered to common policies, can be traced back primarily to the traditions developed by the Tuacc.⁵⁷ This "unique approach to trade union organisation",⁵⁸ was fundamentally tied to its underlying ideology and the aspiration to "workers control". Ncube also stresses Fosatu's commitment to a policy of non-racialism and "worker control", industrial unionism and strategic organising in key sectors and in large multinationals. In this sense, Tuacc defined and deepened the practices already underway in a large wing of the new unions – the wing that would later be identified with workerism.

By the end of 1973, the strike wave had spread, involving workers in both Johannesburg and East London. Tuacc struggled to keep pace with the rapid rate of new organisation in Durban, suffering setbacks and difficulties. In contrast to latter-day claims that Tuacc and the new unions were basically Sactu initiatives, the exiled Sactu in fact repeatedly sought to discredit the new independent unions from abroad,⁵⁹ attempting to sabotage its links to potential support from unions based overseas. Meanwhile, the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) was formed in Johannesburg. Like the GFWBF, the IAS was a complaint service, which "didn't quite know what it was doing, but it was helping workers on a factory by factory basis to gain

⁵⁵ Bonner, "Focus on Fosatu"

⁵⁶ Ulrich, "The Origins"

⁵⁷ Ulrich "Only the Workers"

⁵⁸ Ulrich, *op. cit.*, p. 1

⁵⁹ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg. For an example, see Sactu's press: *Workers Unity*. 1982. "'Direct Links' – Stinks!", April edn.

rights”,⁶⁰ and comprised mostly students and lecturers involved with the Wages Commission at Wits, as well as, in a similar way to the GFWBF, a few Sactu and ANC-inclined members.

It was formed to facilitate the building of political consciousness, as well as strong worker organisation in the Transvaal area.⁶¹ Bernie Fanaroff, active in the IAS and later in Mawu, explained that the idea behind the initiative would be to offer to help workers with immediate problems, but then to use that opportunity to “pull them into these classes”.⁶² It was also formed as a radical alternative to the UTP, which was deemed necessary due to the latter’s links to Tucsa and due to its Africanist outlook. The IAS formed close relations with the Tuacc, and through these relations a Transvaal branch of Mawu was established in 1975.

Despite heavy repression – under which the GFWBF was forced to disband, transforming itself into the TGWU – some stabilisation became evident, culminating in the formation of the Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand (CIWW) towards the end of 1976.⁶³ The CIWW was a new body that aimed to co-ordinate the activities of Mawu in the Transvaal and the IAS, but it was also aimed at incorporating other unions that might want to join, or be formed.⁶⁴ From the start this body, like the IAS, worked closely with Tuacc.

While things raced ahead in Durban and Johannesburg, with both industrial centres boasting their own coordinating bodies by the end of 1973, the Western and Eastern Cape, for a variety of reasons, “lacked even this limited degree of co-ordination”.⁶⁵ Only two coordinating bodies catered for workers in the Western Cape, the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) – which predated Sactu and survived – and the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau (WPWAB). In the Eastern Cape, only the AFCWU was operational.⁶⁶

Tucsa, meanwhile, vacillated on the race issue, but generally accepted the apartheid order. It subscribed to a policy of excluding Africans, and running parallel unions for other Indians and Coloureds, until 1962 when it admitted Africans into an African Affairs section. Then in

⁶⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹ Chris Bonner cited in Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 19

⁶² Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁶³ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.18. Miscellaneous, Document titled “Timeline”, p. 3

⁶⁴ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”

⁶⁵ Bonner, *op. cit.*, p. 8

⁶⁶ *ibid*

1969, this policy was reversed. In the early 1970s, in the wake of the Durban strikes and the explosion of black militancy, Tucsa reopened its doors to unregistered unions for Africans, but only into segregated “parallel unions”, that were subservient to their white “parent” bodies. However, there were important exceptions within Tucsa affiliates that would later prove critical to the formation of Fosatu as a new national federation in 1979.

Besides Tucsa dissidents like Bolton, and those who joined it in order to use Tucsa in order to use its resources for other projects like Hemson and Lambert, a key role was played by Coloured militants in the Tucsa parallel unions. Coloured activist Joe Foster started work at the registered Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union (WPMawu), a Tucsa affiliate, in the late 1960s, after being approached by friends involved in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) who were eager to have a socialist at the helm of the union. Several workers at Leyland had grown tired of the authoritarian and corrupt bureaucracy of their union, and began a campaign to get the secretary ousted. According to Foster, the union was at the time undemocratic and authoritarian, and run by executive committee members who used the union for personal gain.⁶⁷ As part of their efforts at democratisation and radicalisation, the WPMawu introduced shop stewards in the late 1970s, and disaffiliated from Tucsa in 1982.⁶⁸

This paralleled events in the Eastern Cape, where the registered National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa (Numarwosa), which also organised amongst Coloureds, was operating. In reaction to undemocratic style of leadership, a group of “insurgents”⁶⁹ including Fred Sauls, who was working at Ford in the Eastern Cape, began to challenge bureaucratic officials and union structures, and Sauls became union President.

Sauls as President of Numarwosa, and Foster as Secretary of WPMawu, set about democratising the old parallel unions.⁷⁰ With new leadership and democratic structures Numarwosa undertook to broaden its membership and seek co-operation with African workers at Ford.⁷¹ Sauls and others thus set about the organisation of African workers,

⁶⁷Ulrich, “The Origins”

⁶⁸ Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 58.

⁶⁹ Adler, G.M. “‘The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in it’: race, class and collective action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986”, PhD Dissertation: Columbia University. P. 218

⁷⁰Adler, “The Factory”, Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth; Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

⁷¹ Sauls, *op. cit.*

breaking with their union's previous accommodation to Tucsa's policy.⁷² In effect, a parallel union for African workers, the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW), was established. But despite the appearance of racial segregation, there was a significant level of overlap between the union and the African workers' structure, and decision-making and control was shared between Coloured and African workers – with the aim to merge the unions once the new structure gained strength:

We then had combined meetings between the African structure and the Coloured union. And our strategy was that look we have the workers meeting and taking decisions and its rubber-stamped by the so-called registered union. In effect, it's under this umbrella body. So it had control over the liaison committee and the structure had control of the union.⁷³

Largely as a result of their involvement with the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), which supported and promoted the initiative, Numarwosa began actively seeking co-operation with other unions in the metal sector with the aim of the establishment of a national metalworkers' federation, and several meetings were held in Johannesburg. This brought them into contact with activists from Mawu and the IAS, as well as with the UTP unions. They also made links with activists from Tuacc and the IIE, although as indicated, many of these were critical of the strategy of using liaison committees – a strategy employed by Numarwosa in its efforts to organise Africans.

Indeed, it soon became apparent that there were, despite the liaison committee issue, real affinities between Tuacc's organisational style and positions and these Cape-based Unions. Furthermore, these engagements began to influence Numarwosa activists, many of whom had previously been influenced by the NEUM and the ANC, and in some ways were also close to BC.⁷⁴ These interactions, together with material from the IIE after its merger into Tuacc (which was written explicitly with a working class line), helped reinforce the Cape-based activists with a class-based understanding of society.⁷⁵ By 1976, fed up with Tucsa's conservative and bureaucratic stance, Numarwosa disaffiliated from Tucsa. (This followed a suggestion by Numarwosa that the National Congress in 1976 that Tucsa deregister and admit black workers).

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁷⁴ Ulrich, "The Origins"

⁷⁵ Sauls, *op. cit.*

According to Phillip Bonner, a Wits academic involved with Fosatu, it was these unions that soon began raising the possibility of forming an alternative federation to Tucsa, comprising like-minded and unregistered unions.⁷⁶ After an impressive response to the idea, a meeting was held on the 23 March 1977 in Johannesburg, which (despite many hiccups) paved the way for the formation of Fosatu in 1979. A Feasibility Committee comprising delegates from all interested unions was set up to evaluate the possibilities for the new federation. It was clear from the outset (the inaugural congress was held on the 14th and 15th April in Hammanskraal in the Transvaal) that Tuacc activists had “managed to gain considerable sway over the Feasibility Committee”⁷⁷ since it was decided that the new federation would use the Tuacc constitution as the basis for its own. Furthermore, the Tuacc and IAS tradition of open (non-racial) unions was adopted over the UTP tradition. Thus it was the innovative approach pioneered by Tuacc that gave Fosatu its distinctive character: a structure that ensured that workers controlled the organisation at all levels while minimising the influence of non-worker bodies like the IAS and IIE; a commitment to “open” unionism (open to “all races and creeds”⁷⁸), and industrially-based unions brought together under a “tight” federation ensuring a high degree of policy consensus, co-operation and the pooling of resources.

It is important, in closing, to note that these policies and this politics should not be traced back solely to the ideas brought to the unions by radicalised white activists – primarily academics or former academics. This impression has been successfully contested by authors like Ulrich,⁷⁹ Buhlungu⁸⁰ and Ndlovu and Sithole.⁸¹ Buhlungu argues that the “democratic tradition” of the new unions was the product of complex political, intellectual, cultural and traditional sources, of which the “lived experience” of black workers features centrally. Ulrich, meanwhile, suggests that while the contribution by white university-trained officials should not be undermined, workers themselves were heavily influential in shaping the traditions of the Tuacc and GWFBF, and therefore Fosatu. These writers concur that black workers’ experience in organisations, customs, and the negative experience of apartheid, facilitated the development of a commitment to democratic practices, which were nurtured

⁷⁶ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”

⁷⁷ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 30

⁷⁸ Bonner, *op cit.*, p. 22

⁷⁹ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

⁸⁰ Buhlungu, S. 2001. “Democracy and Modernization in the Making of the South African Movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973-2000”, PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand

⁸¹ Ndlovu and Sithole, “The Revival”

and refined through interactions with intellectuals – both university trained, party affiliated, and “organic”.

1.9.2. The Structure of Fosatu

Fosatu was a national federation, with affiliates located in the major industrial centres in the Transvaal, Natal and the Western and Eastern Cape. Unlike its rival Cusa, which was constituted as a loose coordinating body, Fosatu was a “tight” federation, adhering to strict financial and administrative procedures.⁸² It likewise maintained strict integration between the national, regional and local structures, and affiliates adhered to common policies and pooled their resources.

By 1982, through a number of amalgamations, the number of affiliates stood at eight, including the Tuacc-linked Mawu centred on Pietermaritzburg and Durban and NUTW in Durban, alongside the TGWU, the CWIU, the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (Naawu),⁸³ the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (Sfawu), the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (Pwawu), and the Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union (JGU).⁸⁴ According to Adler and Webster, Fosatu and its predecessors,

...focused their organisational efforts in the workplace to develop decentralised structures that could survive when state repression threw head office into disarray. The strategy depended on the development of a cadre of shop stewards integrally linked to the constitution and decision-making structure of the unions. Shop stewards were directly elected by shop floor workers, usually through a secret ballot, and were directly accountable to their constituents. They operated on the basis of strict mandates from the membership and were subject to recall.⁸⁵

These factory-based structures were represented in regional and national committees by mandated workers. The National Congress was the highest decision making body, where each union was represented in line with its size. This was complemented by the Central Committee (or CC), “composed of two representatives from each affiliated union, at least one of whom must be a worker, three representatives from each regional council of which at least

⁸² Friedman, *The Future*, p. 81

⁸³ Naawu was formed out of a merger between Numarwosa, the UAW and the WPMawu.

⁸⁴ See Friedman, M, *op. cit.* p. 75 for a diagrammatic representation of the Fosatu affiliates and Regions. Chapter 8 of this report contains a more detailed discussion of the democratic structures of the federation.

⁸⁵ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 79

two must be workers; the national office bearers president, the Vice-President and the General Secretary – this structure guaranteeing a worker majority”.⁸⁶ The Executive Committee (or Exco), sat alongside these structures at the national level, comprised the President, Vice President and General Secretary, and two representatives from each regional council, and was responsible for carrying out the day-to-day tasks of the federation.

Regional Councils brought together union branches in the various regions, and Regional Executive Committees, consisting two representatives from each affiliate with branches in the region, were responsible for the day-to day activities within that region. At the factory level, shop stewards in the various departments came together to form shop steward committees, rooting the base of the organisation on the shop floor where workers could exercise the most leverage. Lastly, federation shop steward councils (“locals”, or SSCs) – which had been “part of [Fosatu’s] practices, though not of its formal constitutional structure”⁸⁷ – since 1980, brought together shop stewards in the various local areas across industry and union. They were often explicitly organised to deal with area-specific, rather than workplace, issues. Thus Fosatu developed a distinctive organisational structure and style based on direct control by workers organised into structures located on the shop floor.

1.9.3. The Subjects of the Research

This study is based on primary research. In addition to extensive use of the Fosatu archives, press and related sources, in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews were done with fifteen key respondents. These included both worker intellectuals and activist academics, all of whom were directly linked to the Federation – either as members, organisers, or office bearers, or via the various labour support and service organisations to which Fosatu looked for assistance. Respondents were drawn primarily from the CC or Exco, thus either being representatives from the various regions, or representatives of the various affiliates. Most of the respondents had long histories in the labour movement, and some were important in reviving the labour movement in the 1970s.

They included, firstly, Alec Erwin, Fosatu General Secretary from its inception in 1979 until 1983, after which he assumed the important role of Education Secretary. Erwin was involved in the Wages Commissions, after which he worked in the IIE, alongside fellow respondent

⁸⁶ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”, p. 2

Eddie Webster. In 1978 he moved full-time into the unions as the General Secretary of Tuacc, thereafter working for the NUTW before being elected to the CC of Fosatu as General Secretary. He was elected to the post-apartheid government in 1996 as the Minister of Trade and Industry, taking up the position of Minister of Public Enterprise in 2004 and serving until 2008. He is currently retired.

The second key respondent was Joe Foster. He became General Secretary of the WPMawu based at Leyland in the Western Cape in 1972 as part of the campaign to remove the bureaucratised and corrupt leadership that had stifled the unions for years.⁸⁸ Later Foster was elected General Secretary of Fosatu, replacing Alec Erwin. Foster was asked to continue on in Cosatu, into which Fosatu would merge in 1985, but declined. He is currently the vice chair for the Gaming Commission.

Third, Chris Dlamini, who had a history in the ANC or “Congress” movement, was employed at Kellogg’s in the Transvaal.⁸⁹ He was drawn into the UTP through Sfawu prior to the formation of Fosatu, although he had a history in the Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU).⁹⁰ The Sfawu affiliated to Fosatu in 1979, following a split, and in 1981, Dlamini was elected president of the Federation until its dissolution in 1985. After retiring from the labour movement, Dlamini acquired a smallholding near Delmas, Mpumalanga, where he kept livestock. He passed away at the end of 2009.

Phillip Bonner, an academic, was never an office bearer in Fosatu, although he was crucial in developing Fosatu’s education programmes and responsible for writing much of their content. He was nevertheless a founder of the trade unions, played a key role in Tuacc, and was involved with the IAS in Johannesburg and the History Workshop⁹¹ at Wits. The History Workshop was a radical research unit working on labour and social history: established in 1977 at Wits by intellectuals closely linked to the new unions, it had an “interesting

⁸⁸ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town, Cape Town

⁸⁹ Interview with Chris Dlamini, 9th June 2009, Johannesburg

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ The Wits History workshop was a an organisation modeled on that of the same name, set up by historians such as Raphael Samuel, a key figure of the British New Left, who, alongside E.P Thompson resigned from Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the wake of the crushing of the Prague Spring. Both were instrumental in the establishment of the Communist Party Historians Group, and then the *New Left Review*, and founded the Partisan Cafe in Soho in 1956 as a meeting place for the New Left. The History Workshop operated within the framework of “socialist humanism” (an idea developed by E. P Thompson as both an historical and libratory exercise). The History workshop pioneered the concept of “history from below”, a radical popular history alternative that strove to capture the history of ordinary people as opposed to leaders and “great men”.

sympiosis” with Fosatu.⁹² Bonner was also instrumental in Fosatu’s formation, delivering the inaugural speech at the launch of the federation in 1979. Bonner is currently the Research Chair of History for the National Research Foundation (NRF), and head of the History Workshop at Wits, where he continues to lecture and publish.

Moses (“Moss”) Mayekiso was employed in the Toyota Marketing Company in Wineburg in the Transvaal, and joined the Transvaal branch of Mawu (MAWU – Tvl) in 1976.⁹³ He rose through the structures, being elected shop steward, putting him on the union’s executive, after which he was elected National Secretary, and then Treasurer. With the formation of National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which incorporated Mawu and other bodies, Mayekiso was elected the first General Secretary. He continued his union work with Cosatu, and was then elected to the post-apartheid Parliament in 1994, retiring two years later. He is currently a member of Congress of the People (Cope), a breakaway from the ANC.

Daniel Dube worked at SKF in Uitenhage, and joined the UAW in 1977, serving as a shop steward for thirteen years. He was on the executive of Naawu, and served as a Fosatu Executive Committee Member for the entire six years of the federations’ existence. He was elected president of the Numsa at its formation in 1987. He now has his own consultancy, is a partner in Red Cherry Consulting, is the Chairman of the Board of Directors of SHARE, and a non-executive board member of Eskom, the state electricity utility.

Jane Barrett was the full time General Secretary of Nusas in 1978 and 1979, developing her interest in trade unions primarily through exposure to then-popular industrial sociology course at Wits. After a period working as a community activist in Actstop, Barrett joined the TGWU as an organiser in May 1982, thereafter being elected General Secretary of the Union in 1983, which put her on Fosatu’s Executive. She worked for many years for the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (which succeeded the TGWU) as Policy Research Officer and as co-ordinator of union activities in the Transnet Group of state transport utilities. She is currently employed at COSATU Head Office as Affiliates Co-ordinator.

⁹² Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁹³ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

Petros Mashishi worked as an artisan for the Johannesburg City Council, effectively acting as a “shop steward” for the main depot, although no formal union existed. Mashishi approached the IAS with a grievance, after which he was referred to Tuacc, which then coordinated a project, the Tuacc Workers’ Project (TWP), catering for workers for which no union was suitable. Mashishi then worked as an organiser in the TWP. Mashishi was never on the Central or Executive Committee of Fosatu, although he was later elected President of Cosatu’s South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu), serving until the end of 2009.

Eddie Webster was drawn into the labour movement after being “exposed to a kind of deStalinised Marxism” at Mayoral College in Oxford, where he took a keen interest in the “early Marxist writings, the idea of alienation – being expressed in the workplace”.⁹⁴ Upon returning to South Africa, he took up a teaching post at the University of Natal in February 1973, just as the Durban strikes were petering out, and was offered an opportunity to help give organisational form to the largely spontaneous action. He was a co-founder of, and education officer at, the IIE with Rick Turner, and involved with the establishment of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, serving as a board member.⁹⁵ In 1974 he was arrested and detained under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act.⁹⁶ Although never an office-bearer of Fosatu, he worked closely with Bonner in developing material and conducting seminars as part of Fosatu’s worker education programme. He was a founder member of the Society, Work and Development Institute (Swop) at Wits, retiring in June 2009, and awarded the Ela Bhatt Visiting Professorship for Development and Decent Work at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) at Germany’s Kassel University, from October 2009.

Fred Sauls is a worker leader from the Eastern Cape. He was employed at the Ford Motor Company where he got involved with Numarwosa. He was elected President and later National Secretary of Numarwosa, and was arguably the central instigator of the formation of Fosatu. He served on the Fosatu Central Committee as a delegate for Numarwosa,⁹⁷ and after the formation

⁹⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁹⁵ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

⁹⁶ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1976. “Comment: The state and the freedom of association”, Vol. 2, No’s. 9 & 10

⁹⁷ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.1.1.1. Minutes of the Second Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held on the 29th and 30th September 1979 at Koinonia, Durban

of Naawu, as its General Secretary.⁹⁸ He currently works for the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), a statutory industrial relations body, as the Convening Senior Commissioner for the Eastern Cape.

Taffy Adler, who studied at Wits, was involved in both the IAS and CIWW in Johannesburg as an organiser. He served as an organiser from 1977 until the late 1980s, and, although formally employed at Naawu in the Transvaal as an organiser, Adler “assisted quite a lot with Mawu in the early days when they didn't have capacity in Pretoria West, East, Rosslyn and Brits”.⁹⁹ Adler was also the Fosatu Transvaal Regional Secretary, which put him on Fosatu’s Central Committee as a regional delegate - *ex-officio*.¹⁰⁰ In the early 1990s, he was involved in the Labour and Economic Research Centre, and he currently works as the CEO of the Johannesburg Housing Company.

John Copelyn studied a PPE at Wits, where he came into contact with people like Charles Van Onselen, an important revisionist historian, and lecturers like Michael Nupen and Sheldon Leader, both of whom were located in the so-called “Western Marxist” paradigm. (Leader has been described as a Poulantzian¹⁰¹ and Nupen associated with the Frankfurt School, especially the work of Theodor Adorno.¹⁰²) Excited by the Durban strikes, Copelyn moved to Durban, where he became involved first with the IIE, and then with the Textile Workers’ Industrial Union (TWIU), being elected General Secretary shortly afterwards, through which he was elected Secretary of Tuacc. He later served as an organiser in the NUTW, thereafter as its General Secretary in 1982.¹⁰³ Copelyn currently works as the CEO of Hosken Consolidated Investments Limited.

Bernie Fanaroff, upon his return from the United Kingdom in 1975, was invited by Phil Bonner to get involved with the IAS, through which he came into contact with several of the individuals involved with the Wages Commissions, as well as people like Sheldon Leader. He taught at Wits, then, after the formation of Fosatu, Fanaroff became a national organiser for Mawu, which put him on the Central Committee as a union representative. He was also

⁹⁸ McShane, D, Ward, D. and M. Plaut. 1984. *Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*. South End Press: Boston

⁹⁹ Taffy Adler cited in Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 294

¹⁰⁰ See for example, HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.3 Minutes of the 4th Central Committee Meeting held on the 15th and 16th November 1980. Appendix 1 – Delegates

¹⁰¹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰² Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰³ McShane et al., *Power! Black Workers*, p. 69

acting General Secretary of the union when Moses Mayekiso was detained in 1986; however, Fanaroff was never an office-bearer for the Federation. After serving for several years in government, where he played an important part in the drafting of policy, he took up the position of Project Director of South Africa's Square Kilometre Array (SKA) bid and the construction of the Karoo Array Telescope.

Enver Motala is an activist from Northern Natal, whose background was in the NEUM.¹⁰⁴ Motala trained to be a lawyer, graduating in 1972, after which he was invited to participate in Tuacc. He was one of the few lawyers willing to represent striking workers in the 1973 Durban strikes, and was involved with worker training, specifically on para-legal issues, up to 1979.¹⁰⁵ By this time, Motala had given up legal work completely, and took up work for the Labour and Community Education Project (Lacom), which was a project within the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) Trust, on the premise that he would “set up a labour and community education project”.¹⁰⁶ After 1980, Motala, through his work for Sached, was heavily involved with facilitating workshops for Fosatu, as well as for many of its affiliates, and was involved in the production of several Sached publications, including *Freedom from Below*, a popular history of South African unions.¹⁰⁷ He was subsequently asked to set up a research unit at the University of Durban Westville (now part of the University of KwaZulu Natal), after which he worked for government between 1994 and 1998, at which point he began work for the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) facilitating research on issues of human rights, democracy, social justice and education.

Pat Horn, the last of the respondents in this study, was originally involved with student politics, particularly around doing community literacy projects: these were closely aligned to the BCM, and thus racially segregated. Since white communities were generally literate, Horn then got involved with the WPWAB. In 1972 she was approached by Copelyn to get involved with literacy training with the IIE, which she took up – moving to Durban in May 1976. Six months later, Horn was banned alongside Copelyn and various other activists linked to the IIE, during which time she formed close links with the General Workers Union, which had its roots in the WPWAB. After her banning order expired in 1981, Horn re-

¹⁰⁴ Telephone interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ Lacom. *Freedom From Below*

involved herself in union work, taking up a position in Pwawu (which had come into Fosatu at its formation, leaving the UTP and the CCOBTU). From 1985, she worked as an organiser in the CWIU, and later with informal workers. She established the Self-Employed Women's Association in South Africa, modelled on the India-based organisation, from where she got involved with StreetNet (an alliance of international street vendor associations) and Wiego (Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising).

Chapter 2

2. Literature and Methodology



Figure 2. Alec Erwin and June Rose Nala at a FOSATU Rally in Northern Natal, 1980. FOSATU Archives. AH 2680/D21

2.1. Introduction

This chapter encompasses, firstly, a brief discussion of the available literature, outlining the important and political academic debates on workerism and critically reflecting on the various conceptualisations of workerism in the secondary literature. The second part of this chapter looks at the research methodology and methods used in this report. It is shown that literature defining workerism, whether polemical or scholarly, is inconsistent in its analyses.

Scholarly accounts commonly contradict one another, and several accounts are plagued by internal contradictions as well. Workerists are portrayed within and across narratives as being simultaneously advocates of a multitude of different, even opposing political traditions. In attempting to understand workerism therefore, accounts tend to generate more heat than light, making the available literature inadequate for defining the tendency. Importantly, while the political orientation of the workerists cannot be described as a closed, complete ideology, there was certainly an identifiable workerist tradition that exhibited important consistencies and agreements; being far more coherent than is often recognised. Thus, although workerism certainly contained some inconsistencies, confusion results more from tensions in the literature than from tensions in the political current itself.

2.2. Literature Review

2.2.1. Introduction: the changing terrain and backdrop to debates

Fosatu and the workerist tendency with which its leadership was largely identified played a vital role in the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s. It is also the case that this role was highly controversial, and generated a significant amount of tension and debate, both within the labour movement, and amongst the wider forces struggling for liberation in South Africa.

Although the debates are complex, a schematic overview of some of the crucial areas is essential as a backdrop to the forthcoming discussion. Fosatu emerged against the backdrop of the collapse of Sactu as a union in the 1960s, and a subsequent period of turmoil and renewal – epitomised by severe economic upheaval, the Sharpeville massacre, the ideological revolution of the New Left, and the rise of the new unions. While the emergence of these new worker bodies was widely welcomed by opposition forces in the wake of a long period of labour quiescence, their emergence was far from peaceful. Significant contestation and sometimes sharp and heated criticism often obscured debate, both within Fosatu and its predecessors, and between Fosatu and other trade unions, popular organisations and political groups.

The drive towards the formation of the new unions, located as it was in this particular historical intersection, brought together activists from competing and divergent political traditions, all attempting to resurrect the workers struggle in South Africa. The central protagonists tended to revolve around two groups: “those who aimed to create an independent

workers movement” and “those who wanted trade unions to align to the ANC”.¹ For Ulrich, “debates between these two groups would later play a significant role in shaping the trajectory of Fosatu”,² particularly around the question of how the unions should relate to the Congress movement and the various bodies associated with it. This caused significant tension between “the workerists” who tended to recoil at the proposition of a structured alliance with a nationalist party like the ANC, and the “populists” who wanted to go closer to the ANC.

The economic turmoil of the 1970s combined with increasing worker militancy led the state to introduce important pieces of legislation that altered the South African political and labour relations landscape. These included in 1979 the Wiehahn Report, followed by several amendments to the Labour Relations Act in the early 1980s. A new constitution in 1983 provided for the introduction of a tricameral parliament that included Coloureds and Indians,³ although not Africans, and the Koornhof Bills, which extended residential rights and began a process of “development” in townships.

These reforms were deeply controversial. In 1983, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed as an umbrella body to oppose the introduction of the tricameral parliament and the Koornhof Bills.⁴ The UDF was a loose federation, bringing together over five hundred organisations, including civics, student organisations, youth organisations, sports and cultural groups and some trade unions. Affiliates were marked by widely varying organisational structures. Although its national leadership was undoubtedly largely sympathetic to the ANC, the UDF was very decentralised, with a “great deal of decision making power residing at the local level”,⁵ and it contained a wide variety of political currents. It was by no means simply an ANC front as the apartheid government believed (and as ANC ideologues have subsequently insisted). Instead, its politics were fluid, and contested. Even ANC cadre were far from homogenous; they often took positions independent of the exiled ANC, and the UDF was effectively autonomous of the exiled ANC leadership.⁶

¹ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 8

² *ibid*

³ The tricameral parliament, with segregated houses for each race, gave limited control over “own affairs” to Coloureds and Indians, but it did not move control of key issues from the white parliament. (See Lodge, T. and B. Nasson. 1991. *All here and now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. David Phillip: Johannesburg)

⁴ Lodge and Nasson, *op cit*.

⁵ Lodge and Nasson, *All here and now*, p. 53

⁶ Seekings J. 1992. “‘Trailing Behind the Masses’: The United Democratic Front and Township Politics in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal region, 1983-4” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1

2.2.1.1. The “Registration Debate”

The changing terrain posed challenges for the new Fosatu. Thus, “one of the first issues Fosatu and other trade unions had to face in the 1980s was the new labour laws which the government had passed”⁷ and the subsequent altered statutory industrial relations system. The “registration debate” revolved around essentially whether unions should register under the revised Labour Relations Act, which finally enabled African and non-racial unions to participate fully in the official industrial relations system, yet extended the discretionary powers of the state registrar over the affairs of the union. It was widely recognised that this could potentially compromise worker control of the unions. The Tucsa unions, most of which had been registered under the older labour laws (that recognised unions for whites, Indians and Coloureds), naturally registered immediately under the revised Act.

Fosatu also eventually registered, on condition that some initial restrictions – provisions for on-going racial segregation, and provisions excluding migrant African workers (i.e. workers who maintained a homestead in the African reserves, but worked for set periods for wages in the mines, factories and elsewhere), but not urban (i.e. permanently urbanised) Africans – were removed, as did Cusa. Fosatu believed that the reformed law offered important opportunities, although it stressed the importance of avoiding co-optation and of maintaining worker control of the unions (see below). By contrast, several other new unions based amongst Africans – usually general unions based in particular townships, and known as “community unions” – argued vehemently against registration: these included the General Workers Union (GWU), the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu), and the General and Allied Workers Union (Gawu), the latter two of which were generally aligned to the ANC.

The “registration debate” was the source of a significant amount of tension, and had an important impact on the new unions, which by 1981 were meeting to discuss further unity. In 1981, at a unity meeting at Langa at Cape Town, there were immediate divergences on the question of registration. The issue came to a head at a 1982 unity meeting in Port Elizabeth, where the General Workers Union of South Africa (Gwusa) and Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa (Macwusa) walked out in protest over Fosatu’s and Cusa’s registration.

⁷ Lacom, *Freedom from Below*, p. 171

The debate was covered in a number of articles published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* in 1981, where the label of “workerist-reformist clique” was applied to the Fosatu’s leadership by its “populist” rivals.⁸ It revolved, perhaps simplistically, around the question of trade union independence and worker control – but it necessarily brought a range of issues (such as for example differing conceptions of the nature of the state) to the fore.⁹

Those that *boycotted* registration were concerned that it would necessarily involve a substantial loss of independence and control, and would signal the incorporation of the union movement into the state’s industrial relations machinery and thus its rationalisation and bureaucratisation – precisely what *all* unions agreed the new legislation was designed for. The GWU, with its links to the WPWAB, did not wish to work with the state machinery on principle, while Saawu, in line with the ANC position that the apartheid state was “fascist,” also argued for a boycott.

Those arguing *for* registration tended to view the opening up of registration to all unions as a concession won from the state by the growing strength of the union movement. Although they generally agreed that the state’s intention was the restraint of, and control over, the new workers movement, they argued that registration would not *necessarily* signal incorporation and a loss of grassroots control. Conversely, that registration could be used to the benefit of workers; as it gave them access to a degree of legality and opened up opportunities for access to national bargaining forums like the Industrial Councils (or ICs), which were industry-wide bargaining councils.¹⁰

2.2.1.2. The Debate over Legitimacy

Corresponding to this “workerist-populist” split over registration was the struggle between Fosatu and Sactu in both the national and international arenas over legitimacy. Given Sactu’s alignment with the ANC and SACP, Fosatu was therefore struggling with the ANC. A large part of the conflict revolved around the battle for the leadership of the liberation struggle, and was infused corresponding fears on the part of the ANC and Sactu leadership that the

⁸ Haysom, F. 1981. “In Search of Concessions: reply to Fine et al” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 26-27

⁹ See Chapter 6 for further explanation.

¹⁰ See Fine, B, De Klerk, F. and D. Innes. 1981. “Trade Unions and the State: The question of legality” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 2; GWU. 1981. “Reply to Fine, de Klerk and Innes” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3; Haysom, “In Search of Concessions”; Hirsch, A and M. Nicol. 1981. “Trade Unions and the State – a response” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3

workerists in Fosatu would “bypass” the Congress movement in South Africa’s transition. Sactu, although then basically an exile body and not a functioning union in South Africa, nonetheless quixotically insisted at the time that it was the sole legitimate representative of African workers in the country. It denounced many of the new unions as collaborators with apartheid “fascism”, and “yellow unions”.

Several venomous articles were published, including in *Workers Unity* (Sactu’s paper), and in the *African Communist* (the SACP’s theoretical organ) denigrating Fosatu, primarily for its supposed attempt to supplant the “the peoples revolutionary organisations, the ANC (SA) and Sactu”.¹¹ *Workers Unity* responded to Fosatu’s attempts to develop direct links with other unions abroad with the words “‘Direct Links’ – Stinks!” (This, of course, puts the lie to subsequent claims that Tuacc – and by extension, Fosatu – were ANC or Sactu initiatives, claims noted in the previous chapter).

2.2.1.3. The “Workerism-Populism Debate”

The core debate, probably the most significant debate for the purposes of this report, was the so-called “workerist-populist” debate itself, which centred on larger questions of strategy and politics. The rise of the UDF as a central pole of opposition to apartheid changed the political terrain considerably, and posed important questions for the labour movement over how to relate to this new formation. Fosatu (and Cusa) did not join the UDF (to the UDF’s deep disappointment), but unions like Saawu did. The issue of affiliation was the lightning rod that threw down the fire that ignited a prominent and acrimonious debate between the workerists on the one side, meaning here those who refused affiliation and who were thus charged (as we shall see, unfairly) by critics with ignoring the struggles of other oppressed strata and of refusing to involve themselves in political and community struggles; and the “populists” on the other, who were generally supportive of the ANC, arguing for affiliation to the popular UDF and stressing alignment to community groups and struggles.

An early salvo in the debate was an article lambasting Fosatu, which appeared in the UDF’s journal *Isizwe* (‘The Nation’) in 1986, outlining “The Errors of Workerism” (the article’s

¹¹ *Workers Unity*. 1982. “‘Direct Links’ – Stinks!”, April edn.

title) by way of reference to Fosatu.¹² Thus Fosatu and its workerism became the subject of serious controversy in the first half of the 1980s. Of course, it must be stressed that the fierce polemics of the time are not always conducive to understanding what Fosatu's position was: critics of Fosatu in fact used terms like workerism as pejorative labels; what workerism actually meant, and what Fosatu actually advocated, was often obscured in polemics.

As argued in the previous chapter, I *do* maintain that the term workerist can be useful, and that term workerism *did* indeed refer to a particular current in the independent unions, centred on Fosatu. However, I suggest that the term must be defined carefully, and its content understood through the primary materials of Fosatu, rather than the polemics of its rivals or on received views of later writers. I am concerned then to elaborate the political positions held by the workerist group, and the ways in which they were translated into strategy, by reference to what the workerists *themselves* argued – rather than the claims made by critics.

2.2.2. Outline of the Literature

It must be stated that the literature on the subject of workerism is often polemical and hostile. However, even where more balanced and scholarly, it consistently portrays the workerists in many – and differing and contradictory – ways. The literature review that follows will demonstrate some of these inconsistencies, while at the same time unpacking some of the core features of workerism as it was commonly understood by its proponents and the various people who elaborated its doctrines.

While the workerists cannot be described as having articulated a fully developed political programme or as a complete set of ideas, a workerist tradition can be said to have existed because its representatives exhibited important consistencies and agreements. It was therefore far more coherent than is often recognised (Refer to Chapter 3). In fact, its core features have been greatly obscured by much of the literature – and thus, my study hopefully makes an important contribution to the scholarship on South African labour.

Multiple inadequacies, inconsistencies and contradictions exist within and between texts attempting to define workerism. To illustrate, a selection of four key texts (by Baskin, Isizwe,

¹² Isizwe. 1986. "Errors of Workerism" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 52. See also Isizwe. 1986. "The Errors of Workerism", Vol. 1, No. 3, November edn, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/1986/workerism.htm>>

Von Holdt and Pillay) is instructive. According to Baskin, in the official Cosatu history, workerism is described thus:

‘Workerists’... tend to see racism and apartheid as a mask concealing capitalist exploitation. Racism is simply a tool of the ruling class used to enhance the division and exploitation of the working class. Politically, workerists tend to counterpoise the national-democratic and the class struggle. The working class alone, on an anti-racist and socialist programme, can affect real change. Co-operation with other classes is likely to compromise working class objectives. While class alliances are not ruled out, workerists tend to underestimate them or view them with suspicion.¹³

This description does capture some of the characteristics of Fosatu workerism, such as anti-capitalism, class autonomy and distrust of black nationalism (I will show these to be key features of workerist thought in subsequent chapters), but it is also quite superficial. It does not explain, for example, the “working class objectives” that workerism supposedly set. If workerists were against “division and exploitation,” and for an “anti-racist” programme, as Baskin claims, then it is not clear on what basis it could be said that they opposed “national-democratic” struggles. Baskin (like many other authors) seems to conflate national liberation with nationalism (which entails “class alliances” for “national-democratic” change), when in fact his *own* description of workerism as having “an anti-racist and socialist programme” against apartheid *and* capitalism shows that it is possible to envisage *national liberation without nationalism – on the basis of a working class programme*.

Furthermore, Baskin’s characterisation of workerism does not address many of the features that *other* texts see as integral to workerism. Indeed, workerism is assigned somewhat different features – which are often contradictory – in the various texts, confounding analysis of what workerism actually was. For example, whereas Baskin argues that workerists feel that “the working class... can affect real change” but might undertake “class alliances”,¹⁴ other authors, including *Isizwe*, take a stronger line, arguing that the workerists saw the working class as “*the* most progressive class in capitalist societies” (emphasis mine), “clinging to this truth in a very mechanical, one-sided way”.¹⁵

¹³ Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 96

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *Isizwe*, “Errors of Workerism”, p. 51

Von Holdt, who was sympathetic to the “populist” position, goes even further, claiming that not only did workerists “counterpoise” class and national democratic struggle, but in fact believed that nationalism was essentially a “petty bourgeois concern” and that they should steer clear of nationalism.¹⁶ To be against nationalism, he implies, was to be against national liberation – and its immediate task, the anti-apartheid struggle. Von Holdt also claims that workerism was premised on the idea that the “trade unions were the only appropriate vehicle for developing working class politics”.¹⁷ By contrast, Baskin and others have argued that at least some workerists favoured a workers party.

Other contradictions mark the literature. For example, Baskin and Isizwe both imply that the “anti-racist” approach of workerism was directed at the destruction of both apartheid and capitalism. However, their interpretations of the reasons for this differ somewhat; unlike Baskin who sees workerism as premised on a conscious challenge to both apartheid and capitalism, Isizwe claims that workerists argued that a change in the system of production would lead *de facto* to the crumbling of the apartheid system.¹⁸ In any event, other texts suggest that the workerists *ignored* apartheid and racial oppression altogether, focusing narrowly on capitalist exploitation at the workplace. For example, according to Pillay, “social movement unionism” (which he associates with Fosatu’s successor, Cosatu), was an advance, because it combined the best of both “populism” and workerism, by fighting against “*both apartheid and capitalism*” (emphasis original).¹⁹ In other words, the “populists” stressed anti-apartheid struggle (but however ignored capitalism), while the workerists were against capitalism (but unconcerned about fighting apartheid). (Inasmuch as “populists” here signal ANC-aligned nationalists, this is another example of the tendency to assume that one must be *nationalist* to favour national liberation).

Further confusing the picture is that many writers also tried to differentiate workerism into be broken down into discrete strands. Of the workerist unions, for example, von Holdt argues that “although ‘workerism’ dominated their practices, the unions were not monolithic: there

¹⁶ Von Holdt, K. 1987. ‘The political significance of Cosatu: A response to Plaut’ in *Transformation* 5, available at < <http://www.transformation.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/Issue-5/THE-POLITICAL-SIGNIFICANCE-OF-COSATU.html>>, p. 94

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Isizwe, “Errors of Workerism”, pg. 51

¹⁹ Pillay, D. 2008. “Cosatu, the SACP and the ANC in post-Polokwane: Looking Left but does it feel Right?” in *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2

were different strands of ‘workerism’”.²⁰ However, when writers have tried to differentiate the various strands of workerism they have done so differently, often claiming different meanings for different strands, and even conflating tendencies that are contradictory. For example, where Baskin identifies two strands of workerism present in Fosatu, for example, *Isizwe* identifies three. Baskin delineates firstly the “revolutionary socialists”, which he divides into the “partyists”, “entryists” and “embryonic partyists” (all of which he tends to view as Trotskyists), and secondly, the “economists” and “syndicalists,” both of which are described as politically abstentionist, placing stress on trade union work.²¹ Here, union work is seen as not really “political.” By contrast, *Isizwe* distinguishes the “economists” (meaning anti-political “economistic” unions), “syndicalists” (comprising both militant and reformist currents, see below), and thirdly, the workerists “in national democratic clothing” (meaning workerists who “would like to see the UDF become a socialist, workers’ party”).²²

Therefore, dealing with these multiple inconsistencies requires that the material is organised into several categories that represent the numerous ways in which workerism has been portrayed in the literature, while simultaneously identifying those definitions that fall outside of commonly invoked labels. Subsequent discussion will therefore take this form.

Several authors describe one a strand of workerism as “economism”. Generally, accounts of workerism-as-“economism” tend to be relatively consistent. According to Pillay, economism “at best” amounts to what V.I. Lenin described as “trade union consciousness”, which is essentially “narrow worker identity that primarily seeks to advance the interests of the workers at the workplace, through militant struggles against employers and/or through institutionalised bargaining processes”.²³ He adds: “eventually this degenerates into ‘business unionism’, where members are seen as clients and the union as service providers”.²⁴ Buhlungu claims that the position that “crystallised” into workerism revolved around the pursuit of “bread and butter struggles, thereby challenging the system in an incremental

²⁰ Von Holdt, “The Political Significance”, p. 95

²¹ Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 96-97

²² *Isizwe*, “Errors of Workerism”, p. 60

²³ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 9

²⁴ *ibid*

way”.²⁵ Similarly, Eidelberg refers to “economism” as “the avoidance of broader political involvement outside the workplace”.²⁶

Isizwe says something slightly different, viewing “economism” as crude economic reductionism, the view that “everything can be explained by capitalist relations of production”,²⁷ and that therefore, “the only real struggle is on the factory floor”.²⁸ Consequently, according to the journal, “economism” generally entails the dismissal of the “political” struggle as “not so important,”²⁹ even if it admits the need for profound changes – unlike business unionism. *Isizwe* admits that the so-called “economists” are correct in asserting that meaningful change will not arise out of the abolition of apartheid alone. However, the authors criticise this view in the sense that “economism takes these truths and turns them into the whole truth”.³⁰

Von Holdt goes further along these lines, arguing not only that workerism is economistic, but that workerism supposedly “suffers from the theoretical problem of class reductionism”.³¹ He claims that workerism sees apartheid as a mask for capitalist exploitation, thereby reducing politics to the terrain of class struggle. He also accuses workerism of “class essentialism”, meaning the belief that the relations of production bestow on workers an essential class nature leading to the “persistent conflation of trade union with working class with socialist movement”.³² In practice, workerists assume all struggles have a socialist content, and therefore embrace “economism”. According to Von Holdt, this supposedly means that “‘workerism’ cannot in any concrete practical way engage workers in political struggle” beyond ordinary workplace issues.³³ Steven Friedman, by contrast, claims there was an “economistic” tendency within Fosatu, in that its leadership felt that “political links would divert their energies from the factories”.³⁴ However, he maintains that this apparent

²⁵ Buhlungu, S. 2010. *A Paradox of Victory: Cosatu and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu Natal Press: South Africa, p. 22.

²⁶ Eidelberg, P.G. 2000. “The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu the ANC and the SACP” in Barchiesi, F. and T. Bramble (eds.). *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*. MacMillan: Great Britain, p. 149

²⁷ Isizwe, “Errors of Workerism”, in *South African Labour Bulletin*, p. 55

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Von Holdt, “The Political Significance”, p. 98

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 432
S. *ibid*

“apolitical” approach was informed by “more far reaching reasons”,³⁵ like security concerns, than an embrace of business unionism, economic determinism or a fetishism of trade unionism.

Mosenthal discusses the criticisms of Marxist academic Duncan Innes, who debated Alec Erwin (workerist General Secretary of Fosatu) over the anti-apartheid struggle. In the debate, Innes accused Erwin of *both* “economism” and “syndicalism”, while at the same time warning against the “dangers”³⁶ of both. Innes used these terms in somewhat unusual ways. For him, “syndicalism” constitutes a focus on shop floor activity (what the other writers call “economism”), while “economism” is defined as a ‘theoretical approach which reduces fundamental social contradictions to economic forms... and relations... by asserting their determinance’,³⁷ which is closer to von Holdt’s view that workerism rests on “class essentialism”. In other words, Erwin’s approach was castigated as theoretically reductionist, in that all social contradictions are determined by economic forms and relations – quite different to Pillay’s and Eidelberg’s notions that economism meant apoliticism.

But this type of argument, in turn, contradicts other meanings given to “syndicalism” by critics of workerism. These routinely concede that this “syndicalism,” while sceptical of the ANC, was far from “economistic” or “reductionist”. For example, Pillay’s workerist “syndicalism” involves a “broader conception of struggle”,³⁸ where workers are encouraged to participate in the struggle against apartheid. These “syndicalists” tended to be wary of political and community activists, who are not familiar with trade union practices that stressed shop floor democratic processes, but *were* nonetheless very “political”. These trade unionists engaged in “political” struggles outside the workplace – but as “unionists”.³⁹

Placing the emphasis on *unions* is here a common description of the “syndicalist” tendency (although, confusingly, as we have seen, others label what is here called “syndicalism” as “economism”). ‘Komanisi’ of the SACP actually equated workerism *in general* with syndicalism. Syndicalism here is described as postulating the “primacy of the class struggle”,

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Mosenthal, D. 1998. “Flight from Class and Principle: an examination of Alliance politics and the role of intellectuals in struggle, towards a discussion of the relation between theoretical conceptualisation of struggle and academic Marxist processes of thought”. Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 72

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ Pillay, D. 2008. “Cosatu, the SACP and the ANC in post-Polokwane: Looking Left but does it feel Right?” in *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 9

³⁹ *ibid*

where “national oppression was primarily a function of (class-based) capital accumulation” and thus the “primary form of organisation taking forward the working class struggle... was the trade union organisation on the shop floor”.⁴⁰

Buhlungu also argues that the workerist tendency was *inherently* political: if it focused on trade unions, it did so deliberately, because it saw the “emerging labour movement as an ideological alternative to the Congress movement”.⁴¹ He also provides us with a description of the objectives of the dominant Fosatu workerist current, which (according to him) “saw socialism as a series of processes of winning power – from workers’ control of production to taking over many policy-making functions within the state”.⁴² So here workerism is linked to politics, but to a more social democratic conception of change. Besides the “syndicalists,” other workerists, he claimed (like Baskin) even “championed the cause of a new workers’ party”.⁴³

It should be clear, then, that the notion of workerism-as-“economism” is quite different to the notion of workerism-as-“syndicalism”. Further attempts at differentiation can also be identified. Both *Isizwe* and ‘Komanisi’ argued that the “syndicalists” comprised both “militant” (*Isizwe*) or “radical” (‘Komanisi’) and “reformist” subcategories.⁴⁴ For *Isizwe*, “syndicalism”, which is described as a “reformed brand of economism”, does *not* deny the need for workers to get involved in wider political issues, “but it sees the trade union as the main, or even the only organisational base for political involvement”.⁴⁵ The reformist camp envisages the emergence of some form of movement or party (similar to the British Labour Party) out of the trade unions. The militant “syndicalists” argue that the trade unions are “the spearhead of attack on the apartheid government and bourgeois rule”, with their chosen strategy as the general strike – often to the exclusion of all other strategies and tactics.⁴⁶

In a study of Numsa (and Mawu), the key “workerist” union, Forrest seems to draw similar conclusions. She postulates that three distinct tendencies could be discerned in the union, all

⁴⁰ ‘Komanisi’, B. 2006. “State Power” in the *Information Bulletin of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party*, Vol. 5, No. 1, available at

<<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/2006/komaniko.htm>>, no page numbers

⁴¹ Buhlungu, S. 2005. “Trade Unions and the Making of the Mass Movement” in *Khanya*, No. 8, p. 14

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *Isizwe*, “Errors of Workerism”, p. 57; Komanisi, “State Power”, no page numbers

⁴⁵ *Isizwe*, *op. cit.*, p. 57

⁴⁶ *Isizwe*, *op. cit.*

of which dominated in specific regions:⁴⁷ “Charterism” in the Eastern Cape; “Ultra Left” Trotskyism in the “Wits East and Wits Central” (Gauteng) regions, and “syndicalism”, clustering around the “former Mawu ‘workerists’” in Natal, the Western Cape, and in the Highveld.⁴⁸ Forrest claimed that this “syndicalist” group had, by the late 1980s, begun to exhibit a much greater “openness and flexibility in its political stance than had been the case in Mawu”, favouring a socialist-leaning Labour Party akin to the Workers Party (PT) the emerging in Brazil”.⁴⁹ But she then goes on to say, “it belonged to the strand of syndicalism that acknowledged the need for some form of national co-coordinating body or as [anarcho-syndicalist theorist Rudolf] Rocker phrases it ‘general industrial alliances’”. Thus, unlike Buhlungu – who separates “syndicalists” from other workerists who “championed the cause of a workers party” – then, Forrest draws no such distinction, seeing no contradiction between Rudolf Rocker’s anarcho-syndicalism, and a “syndicalism” that argues for a Brazilian-style workers party.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Forrest concurs with Buhlungu in claiming that the “syndicalists” in Numsa had a sort of social democratic approach, and “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”.⁵¹

If here we have a conflation of syndicalism with social democracy, we find in Mosenthal a conflation of “syndicalism” with “economism”: “these ‘workerists’ tended to push for syndicalist trade union independence which amounted to an ideology of economism”.⁵² This view – workerism equals “syndicalism” equals “economism” equals political abstention – is completely incompatible with the view of workerist “syndicalism” as inherently political and as viewing the unions as “taking over” various functions of the state.⁵³

⁴⁷ Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 649

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 651

⁴⁹ Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 649

⁵⁰ *ibid*. In fact, this is a misreading of Rocker. Rocker in fact opposed the idea of forming a workers party to assume state power, and so, parties like Brazilian PT. To illustrate: “In reality every section of history affords us thousands of examples of the way in which the economic development of a country has been set back for centuries and forced into prescribed forms by particular struggles for political power”. In contrast, Rocker posits, “The lancehead of the labour movement is therefore not the political party, but the trade union” (Rocker, R. 2004. *Anarcho-Syndicalism*. AK Press: Oakland, p. 58).

⁵¹ Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 561

⁵² Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 80

⁵³ Buhlungu, “Trade Unions and the Making”, p. 2005

For Pillay, in addition to these categories there exists a further two categories of workerists, the “independent socialists”, and the “partyists” (or “worker-partyists”).⁵⁴ The independent socialists, according to Pillay, were “appreciative” of the “nationalist” struggle and therefore of the ANC, but pushed for the national-democratic movement to forge alliances with *all* anti-apartheid political formations (including the Pan Africanist Congress, or PAC, and the BCM) while retaining the independence of the working class movement. This is done in order to “make working class politics hegemonic” in the broadest possible front.⁵⁵ This notion seems to be unique to Pillay; it does not appear in any of the other texts consulted.

The workerism-as-“partyist” characterisation, however, is mentioned relatively often. For Pillay, this tendency went “one step further” than the syndicalists, wanting to “link up with the broader working class beyond the point of production, and develop a transformatory or revolutionary working class consciousness” but in the form of a “union-based political party with an explicitly socialist programme”.⁵⁶ Bell has argued on similar lines, and bluntly claims that the workerists were synonymous with what Pillay called “partyists”): “the workerists of the 1980s saw the best interests of the working people being served by an independent political party, which many believed would rise from within the movement”,⁵⁷ and therefore the workerists were “united *only* in their demand for a workers’ party”.⁵⁸ Thus, while many other writers stress the ambivalence of the workerists to parties and politics, Bell insists that they actually all shared a predilection for a “workers’ party”.

Adding to the conceptual morass, other writers did see “partyism” as core to workerism, but insisted that the “workers party”, with which workerists were supposedly enamoured was *not* envisaged as a social democratic or PT-style party, but a Leninist vanguard. Pillay indicates this when he speaks of a variant of the “partyist” tendency, as “the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC”, “a Trotskyist group whose intention was to transform the ANC into a mass workers party (in opposition to the SACP)”.⁵⁹ Mosenthal also claims that Fosatu’s “Foster posit[ed] a need for the formation of an independent *vanguard party* precisely

⁵⁴ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 10

⁵⁵ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 10

⁵⁶ Pillay in Buhlungu, “Trade Unions and Democracy”, p. 170

⁵⁷ Bell, T. 2006. “Cosatu goes to Congress riven by worst dissent in 20 years” in *Business Report*, available at <<http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Cosatu,+How+I+miss+Moses+Mayekiso,+Terry+Bell,+Business+Report>>, no page numbers

⁵⁸ *ibid*, my emphasis

⁵⁹ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 10

because he [understood] the limitations of trade unions entry into political struggle”,⁶⁰ but these views are contradicted elsewhere. Johnson, for example, argues that Foster “mooted the formation of a political party of organised labour – a logical extension of the notion of working class independence”, adding, “many workerists” supported “the notion that the union movement should *reject* affiliation to established parties and should establish their own political wing”.⁶¹

Baskin, likewise identifies a “revolutionary socialist” tendency within workerism that saw trade unions as “a stepping stone to a revolutionary Marxist party”.⁶² But unlike Pillay, he subdivides further this group into “partyists”, “entryists” and “embryonic partyists”. “Partyism” here, in common with Pillay’s classification, refers to the tendency that aims to create a vanguard party from within the labour movement. “Entryists”, however are different in the sense that they seek to “infiltrate unions and create a ‘tendency’ within the ANC”⁶³ – the Marxist Workers Tendency mentioned by Pillay presumably represents this. The “embryonic partyists” are not discussed in detail, but are represented by the (Trotskyite) Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), which aimed to launch a mass workers party with union support.

Yet if some writers insist that a “partyist” approach as a central feature of workerism, others argue that it was *opposition* to parties that lay at the heart of workerism. According to Dwyer, workerism denotes those on the left, that “by concentrating their political work on the relationship between capital and labour, mainly trade union work, downplayed the contradictory nature of working class consciousness and downplayed the political issues in the townships”, and therefore were *against* “forming an independent socialist organisation that could have united the political struggles in the trade unions and townships”.⁶⁴ Dwyer’s analysis was also propagated by several Trotskyist groups in the 1980s,⁶⁵ as well as by prominent South African figures like ANC and SACP leader Joe Slovo. Slovo spoke the existence of what he called “left ‘workerists’”; union-linked academics that tend to “put forward a view of working class political organisation more appropriate to a trade union than

⁶⁰ Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 88, my emphasis

⁶¹ Johnson, S. 1989. *South Africa: No turning back*. MacMillan: London, p. 162

⁶² Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 96

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Dwyer, “South Africa”, p. 204

⁶⁵ For example, the *Spartacist*, a Trotskyist publication, takes this line claiming that, “the fact is, these guys were opposed to ‘political parties’ and a ‘political vanguard’. They were trapped within trade union politics, quasi-syndicalism” (No author. 2002 – 2003. *Spartacist South Africa*. Winter edn., p. 15)

a revolutionary political Vanguard”.⁶⁶ In this sense, it appears that “left ‘workerism’” may in fact be the same as what other authors refer to as “syndicalism”.

Then there is the category identified by *Isizwe* described as workerism “in national democratic clothing”.⁶⁷ These workerists, do not supposedly subscribe to the “national democratic struggle”, but merely “pay lip service”⁶⁸ to it in an attempt to transform the UDF into a socialist workers’ party. It seems that this may match the “entryist” tendency described by Baskin, although this is unclear. Nevertheless, *Isizwe* argued that this “watered-down version” of ‘workerism’ encompasses “a very defeatist, passive attitude towards the oppressed, black petty bourgeoisie, and middle strata in our country”, while claiming that all efforts should be concentrated on the black working class.⁶⁹

This brings us back to the contentious issue of affiliation to the UDF, and the relationship of workerism to other strata outside of the unions. Again, various reasons have been highlighted in the literature claiming to explain Fosatu’s refusal to affiliate. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, many of these *were* cited by Fosatu as justification of its position, however, again certain inconsistencies present themselves in the literature.

Ncube argues that Fosatu declined to join the UDF because it “did not like to carry the antagonistic ideological differences between these organisations to the members on the factory floor”.⁷⁰ What exactly were these ideological differences? Again, the literature is inconsistent. According to Callinicos “‘workerists’ rejected the ANC-SACP two stages strategy” in favour of “socialist revolution”, but placed “primary emphasis on building strong, politically independent trade union organisation” thus rejecting “at least as an immediate priority, the need to lay the basis of a worker’s party as a socialist alternative to Congress”.⁷¹

This interpretation, of course, contradicts the arguments made by Pillay, Bell and Baskin that the workerists were urging the formation of an independent workers socialist party of some

⁶⁶ Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 87

⁶⁷ *Isizwe*, “Errors of workerism”, p. 59

⁶⁸ *Isizwe*, “Errors of workerism”, p. 59

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 61

⁷⁰ Ncube, D. 1985. *Black Trade Unions*. Skotaville Publishers: Johannesburg, p. 129

⁷¹ Callinicos, A. 1992. *Between Apartheid and*, p. 31

sort,⁷² as well as the *Isizwe* argument that workerists wanted to capture the UDF in order to launch their supposed party. Secondly, it seems to suggest that the workerists refused to join the UDF because it was (in the words of Mayekiso) an ANC “surrogate”.⁷³

Meanwhile, the claim that the workerists rejected the two-stage theory of the SACP cannot be reconciled with the notion of workerism-as-“economism”. Eidelberg, for example, makes a similar point to Callinicos, maintaining that Erwin, who coined Fosatu’s slogan “Building Tomorrow Today”, “had, at the time, used the slogan to attack the SACP’s two stage policy, which he felt needlessly and dangerously postponed the true socio-economic transformation for the sake of the national democratic revolution”.⁷⁴ Slovo himself also adopted this position, maintaining that “‘workerism’ insist[ed] on a perspective of an immediate struggle for socialism, a transitional stage of struggle, involving inter-class alliances” which was “alleged to lead to an abandonment of socialist perspectives and to a surrender of working class leadership” (i.e. rejecting the SACP’s two-stage strategy).⁷⁵ Of course, this contradicts also the notion in *other* ANC and SACP material that workerism was apolitical or narrowly focused on the workplace.

Mosenthal on the other hand disagrees, asking, “Who is Slovo referring to when characterising ‘workerists’ as those who reject both inter-class alliance and transitional stages to struggle?”⁷⁶ While he seemed to agree that the workerists rejected transitional stages, he feels that they did *not* reject interclass alliances: “examples of a rejection of the former are virtually non existent”,⁷⁷ emphasizing that “neither Innes nor Erwin has ever rejected inter-class alliances”,⁷⁸ a point that, as we have seen, Baskin has also suggested. But did they accept such alliances? Again, the literature is at odds. Steven Friedman argues, (in contrast), that the workerists understood that “workers had different interests to other black groups and could not pursue them in a political alliance with non-workers”.⁷⁹ In fact, a large majority of sources make a similar claim.

⁷² Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”; Bell, “Cosatu goes to Congress”; Baskin, “Striking Back”

⁷³ Mayekiso, M. 1996. *Township Politics: Civic struggles for a new South Africa*, Monthly Review Press: New York, p. 67

⁷⁴ Eidelberg, “The Tripartite Alliance”, p. 144

⁷⁵ Cited in Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 86

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 432

Related to this, Pillay notes that workerists “feared the growing working class movement... would be ‘hi-jacked’ by black nationalism” unless its autonomy from other class was maintained. It was for this reason that workerists were “wary of all political organisations, including the ANC and the ‘Stalinist’ SACP (who they accused of tailing behind the ANC with their ‘two-stage’ theory)”.⁸⁰

This relates in turn to the prominent and contentious issue of working class leadership of the struggle. Jeremy Cronin, an SACP and UDF ideologue, for example, argued that “workerism, while correctly calling for a leading role for the working class, fail[ed] to see that this leadership must be exercised on all fronts of the struggle”.⁸¹ Pillay seems to agree – highlighting that the UDF consistently re-asserted the need for working class leadership of the liberation movement (with “worker leaders rising to the fore in all formations of the Alliance, under conditions of participatory democracy”⁸²), and that workerists erred in failing to appreciate this. Steven Friedman concurs here, but justifies Fosatu’s refusal to affiliate pointing out, although UDF “leaders said repeatedly that workers should lead the fight for change”, it “did not offer them special rights to ensure that they did and the unions suspected it wanted them to provide the foot soldiers it lacked”.⁸³

Similar objections were held by some of those who subscribed to the Marxist left-wing of the BC tradition, writing for *Free Azania*. They felt the UDF was not (as it often presented itself) an “agreement for joint action on specific issues” because “it first and foremost involves an acceptance by all participants of a common programme”. But “to form a structural union on the basis of a popular (multi-class) programme” would mean that “the working class must give up its own class programme”.⁸⁴

Apart from the issues of “national democratic” struggle, and two-stage theory, class leadership and multi-class alliances, several authors have suggested that it was the structure of the UDF that constituted the reason for non-affiliation. According to Steven Friedman “Fosatu complained that the UDF structures were not democratic”,⁸⁵ pointing out that each affiliate had two votes on its executive, regardless of its size and capabilities to mobilise

⁸⁰ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 8-9

⁸¹ cited in Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 66; also see *Isizwe*, “The Errors of Workerism”, p. 62

⁸² Pillay, *op. cit.*, p. 12

⁸³ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 441

⁸⁴ *Free Azania* cited in Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 84

⁸⁵ Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 440

support. It was felt that the trade unions could mobilise “far more people than any other UDF group”.⁸⁶ Friedman quotes a Fosatu member who complained “someone would decide around some kitchen table that everybody should wear black, green and gold (the A.N.C.’s colours) at a meeting; we were never consulted and the next thing we knew, police were raiding our offices”.⁸⁷ Friedman also argues that Fosatu was concerned by the structure of the organisations under the UDF banner, which did not make use of the trade unionist strategy of mandates and report-backs and accountable structures, being rather made up of a hierarchy of leaders and followers in loose structures without clear rules. Fosatu felt that because of this structurelessness, community activists would “spend more time fighting each other than the government; instead of organising residents they carried on their jockeying for power at endless committee meetings and their campaigns were never more than press statements”.⁸⁸ In any case, for Fosatu it also meant that basic accountability was impossible: can demagogues, often, be recalled or mandated, by their working class followers?

2.2.3. Heat and Light: How Useful are these Claims?

We have seen how workerism has been characterised, and noted that these characterisations are inconsistent, contradictory and questionable. Moreover, they are far from reliable and even baseless in many cases. For example, one of the core charges levelled against workerism – that of “economism” in the sense of a refusal to engage with “political” issues – can easily be refuted.

There is no doubt that the workerists were sceptical of the ANC, and wary of multi-class alliances. Yet this in no sense made workerism apolitical, or oblivious to the national liberation struggle, or inclined to business unionism. On the contrary, the Fosatu unions were *profoundly political*. The struggle against racial oppression in the workplace was a key element of Fosatu’s work, and this struggle was as “political” as any struggle against racial oppression in the community. Apartheid did not stop in the townships. Workplace struggles raise basic issues of power, rights and redistribution, and as Legassick has pointed out, “the new unions... were not ‘non-political unions’ because their very existence was a challenge to the state’s dual system of industrial relations”.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁸⁷ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p 435-6

⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁸⁹ Legassick, M. “Debating the revival”

Fosatu also tackled issues that went beyond the workplace. In contesting of the original amendments of the Labour Relations Act, and securing the removal of clauses that reproduced segregation or that discriminated against migrant workers, Fosatu tackled national state policy on the key issues of race and township planning. As another example, while Fosatu did not join the UDF, it did campaign actively against the tricameral parliament, calling for a boycott and organising door-to-door campaigns.⁹⁰

I will discuss the role of Fosatu outside the workplace in more detail below, but for now, the key point is that the evidence supports Ulrich's criticism of the tendency in the literature to criticise Fosatu as apolitical for not allying with political *organisations*.⁹¹ Trade unions by definition raise political issues and wage political struggles, even if only by challenging power relations at work – and actually Fosatu's activities went far beyond this.⁹² Fosatu itself stressed that "Trade union organisation is deeply political – it is about working people winning back control over their lives".⁹³ (There will be more discussion on this issue in later chapters).

Similarly, Ritchken argued twenty years ago against the description of Fosatu as workerist, if this label meant it was apolitical or economistic: "The characterisation... Fosatu as an essentially 'workerist' federation is both empirically wrong and, with regard to urban struggles, conceals more than it reveals".⁹⁴ He goes on to show that despite the claims otherwise, the debate within Fosatu was never about *whether* or not unions should fight for political rights or have alliances with community organisations but about *how* and *when* to do it without sacrificing internal democracy and working class leadership. Ritchken also claims that the label obscures as the "subtle links between shopfloor demands and broader political struggles".⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Trade Union Library (hereafter TULEC): Salha 8 cl: Fosatu. *Fosatu Press Digest* (hereafter FPD). "Don't Vote in August – Fosatu", 3 June 1984, No. 58, TULEC. Salha 8c2: Fosatu. Sunday Tribune in *FPD*. "Employers slam role of the Industrial Court at seminar", 6th May 1984. Employer outcry later prompted the Department of Manpower to curb the powers of the Industrial Court. (TULEC. Salha c2: Fosatu. Friedman, S. in *FPD*. "Court Under Pressure", 11th February 1984)

⁹¹ Ulrich, "Only the Workers"

⁹² See Ulrich, "Only the Workers"

⁹³ See HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.3 Industrial Relations Under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet. p. 28

⁹⁴ Ritchken, "Trade Unions and", p. 40

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 41

This points to obvious problems in the literature. For one, the polemical character of many of the claims has already been noted. Partly this relates to the reality that the “populists” had no immediate programme for socialism (even the SACP deferred this to a vague future, concentrating on a cross-class nationalist project), and often used Leninist language to dismiss their opponents while asserting their own ostensibly revolutionary credentials. Thus, rather than use actual syndicalist writings to criticise “syndicalism”, or referencing workerist syndicalism by way of by allusion to actual, historical revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalism, these writers understood syndicalism through the distorting lens of its bitter enemies, like Lenin. The basic lack of understanding ensuing is evident from claims that workerists could be simultaneously “syndicalist” *and* in favour of capturing state power, simultaneously “syndicalist” *and* in favour of a mass workers’ party, simultaneously “syndicalist” *and* in favour of the policies of the British Labour Party.

As Holton has pointed out, the derogatory use of the term “syndicalism” – and the tendency to conflate syndicalism and “economism” – has its roots with Lenin and Lukacs, “who sought to explain the failure of proletarian revolution in Russia”.⁹⁶ This was found in the “supposedly anti-political stance of syndicalist movements”, resulting in “the inability of other European working classes to seize state power”.⁹⁷ For Holton, “the legacy... of the anti-syndicalist critique... remains influential today”.⁹⁸ Lenin was central to what Hyman calls the “pessimistic tradition” of Marxism on unions,⁹⁹ in which unions are seen as inherently reformist, unable to move beyond a narrow economic outlook, or “trade union consciousness”,¹⁰⁰ and this undoubtedly has played a major role in these misunderstandings.

Lenin’s charges against syndicalism – that it ignored the state, posited a spontaneous revolution, and ignored non-workplace issues – are baseless, a “gross distortion”¹⁰¹ that serves

⁹⁶ Holton, R.J. 1980. “Syndicalist Theories of the State” in *Sociological Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p.5

⁹⁷ *ibid*

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ According to Hyman, Lenin introduced the idea, which has gained wide currency within labour studies and the labour movement more generally, that trade unions are inherently reformist, focussing on economic gains within the system of capitalism, amounting to a narrow trade union consciousness – at the expense of a more political, socialist consciousness amongst members (See Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*). The notion that unions are incapable of making a revolution and are trapped in reformism – and that therefore, the working class had to take state power through a (Marxist) political party – is, however, a commonplace in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ work. See for example Engels, F. [1873] 1972. “The Bakuninists at Work: an account of the Spanish Revolt in the summer of 1873” in Kolpinsky, N.Y. (ed.), *Marx, Engels, Lenin: anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism*. Progress Publishers: Moscow

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ Holton, *op. cit.*

polemic, rather than accuracy. Syndicalism was an inherently political as well as economic strategy that rejected parliamentary politics in favour of a mass working class movement from below – centred on but not exclusively comprised of unions – for self-management and libertarian socialism, free of hierarchies of all types.¹⁰² Thus,

Embedded in larger popular movements and counter-cultures, linked to other organised popular constituencies, taking up issues that went well beyond the workplace, and playing a central role in community struggles, and at the heart of a project of revolutionary propaganda, including the production of mass circulation daily and weekly newspapers, the historical syndicalist unions were social movements that never reduced the working class to wage earners, or the aspirations of the working class to wages.¹⁰³

More problems arise when we examine whether the specific charges levelled against Fosatu – that it ignored the anti-apartheid struggle; that it argued that unions should avoid all political issues; that it suggested that workplace struggles automatically lead to socialism – are accurate in the first place. Even a brief examination of Fosatu’s history shows these accusations to be unsustainable and misleading.

According to Baskin himself, Fosatu’s policy was to organise a factory base first and *then* consider open political involvement. This is not “economism”. The founding congress of Fosatu explicitly stated that unions *could and should* get involved in politics: rather than ignore politics, they should establish an “independent worker politics” in place of (ANC) “populist nationalism” – which is precisely what they sort to practice in subsequent years. Geoff Schreiner (former Fosatu Education Secretary) asserted that “there were... many examples of local level co-operation between Fosatu affiliates and youth and civic groupings around specific community and factory issues” citing “the removals at Brits and Uitenhage, unemployment in Springs, rents in the Vaal and the Simba-Quix, Dunlop and Sarmcol strikes to name but a few”.¹⁰⁴ Both Baskin and Steven Friedman identify 1982 – the year before the formation of the UDF – as the beginning of an even more active engagement in “political issues” by Fosatu unions.¹⁰⁵ According to Friedman, at its 1982 congress Fosatu pledged to

¹⁰² *ibid.* Also see van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

¹⁰³ Van der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 21

¹⁰⁴ Schreiner, G. 1987. “Cosatu Strategy in Natal” in *Work in Progress*, p. 23

¹⁰⁵ Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 31; Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 277

“seek political change without sacrificing its independence or factory base”¹⁰⁶ by way of a strategy which sought for workers to dominate key industrial areas so that members would constitute the majority, and in turn *control* their township-based organisations. The year before, Fosatu’s CC expressed its anger that its policy of non-affiliation to political parties “has been completely misconstrued and many people are interpreting it to mean that Fosatu regards itself as divorced from the political arena and it is therefore completely economic in outlook and approach. If Fosatu wishes to maintain its position... all efforts should be made to correct this misinterpretation”.¹⁰⁷

To return to an earlier point: the Fosatu unions actively and overtly participated in various anti-apartheid “political” campaigns – both prior to and after the 1982 “turning point” described by Baskin and Friedman. Fosatu’s refusal to register in the official industrial relations system until the residual elements of labour movement segregation were removed is just one. When these concessions were granted, Fosatu had not simply gained its legal status and the rights registration afforded it, it had simultaneously changed the content of an important piece of legislation and so, of the terrain on which the national liberation struggle itself was waged – clearly not an economic ambition.

In another example, Ritchken shows that the core membership of Fosatu unions was made up of migrants.¹⁰⁸ According to him, retrenchments were devastating to migrants because it meant not only the loss of an income, but also their very access to the urban areas. Ritchken discusses at least two factories organised by Fosatu in which urban African labourers voluntarily accepted retrenchments in order to save the jobs of migrants, thereby allowing for their continuing unionisation. This indirectly “prevented the Wiehahn Commission from entrenching the insider/outsider distinction” – that is, between urbanized/ migrant – “in relation to the right to work so that the law was changed in 1981 to allow migrants and Bantustan commuters to belong to registered trade unions”.¹⁰⁹

It is also acknowledged by Baskin that Fosatu’s innovations included the establishment of the shop stewards’ councils, known as “locals”, which “brought together workers from a

¹⁰⁶ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 441

¹⁰⁷ See HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.3, Agenda for 1981 Central Committee Meeting, pg. 3

¹⁰⁸ Ritchken, “Trade Unions and”, p. 41

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

particular township or industrial area”¹¹⁰ in order to take its membership beyond a plant level consciousness. As he notes, this had the consequence of workers taking up “more general” political problems faced by black communities.¹¹¹ Locals also planned to set up worker committees in the townships to identify community needs, which would be relayed via the shop stewards back to the workplace and union.¹¹²

Fosatu, as noted, participated in the campaign against the tricameral elections, canvassing townships in order to explain the merits of boycotting a boycott position¹¹³ – even if “in isolation from other organisations”.¹¹⁴ This is not “economism”, and hardly an example of ignoring the anti-apartheid struggle. In fact, according to Steven Friedman, at this stage “it was no longer” the “community” unions (like Saawu) who were linked to the UDF and stressed their commitment to “political unionism” “who were mobilising workers around political goals,” but their older rivals like Fosatu.¹¹⁵

In 1984, Fosatu participated in a stayaway (a general strike, almost always with political aims), its Central Committee stating that it supported demands like the removal of the age limit in schools, democratically constituted SRCs, the removal of the army from the townships and the suspension of police harassment and a moratorium of bus fare and rent increases.¹¹⁶ While several writers have implied that this participation was a break with traditional Fosatu positions – and imposed from below on a reluctant workerist leadership – I would stress that it *followed* logically from earlier Fosatu positions and actions, which showed a consistent commitment to broader political and community involvement well before 1984.

Fosatu’s leadership actively encouraged its membership to join community-based political organisations, and participate in community struggles,¹¹⁷ which also does not fit with the description of workerism as being centred solely on trade unions as agents of social transformation.¹¹⁸ It obviously contradicts the claim in *Isizwe* that syndicalism held back

¹¹⁰ Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 31

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² *ibid*

¹¹³ Baskin, *Striking Back*

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 43

¹¹⁵ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 445

¹¹⁶ HP: AH 1999 C3.14. Statement by the Fosatu CC

¹¹⁷ HP: AH 2065 D3.2 Meeting of the Transvaal Regional Congress 9th Feb 1985

¹¹⁸ Friedman, *op. cit.*

workers “from the fullest involvement in popular organisations and alliances”,¹¹⁹ or by Mosenthal’s notion that “syndicalist policy also inhibited the development of a radical political consciousness”.¹²⁰

It is striking that while almost all of the authors described above have undertaken to illuminate the views and ideas held by those in Fosatu’s leadership, with very few exceptions most have not actually attempted to explicate in depth how these ideas came to be formed, or how they locked into contemporaneous ideas and debates in the global sphere. In fact, there seems to be somewhat of a bifurcation in the literature in this regard. Those texts dealing with the emergence and development of the black labour movement specifically tend to either ignore downplay, or skim over some of the ideological influences that shaped Fosatu’s approach, thus failing to understand or articulate the evolutionary and contextual nature of workerism. Most of these studies take a narrower approach to analysis through discussion of, for example, key strikes and trade union policies, without incorporating the broader global, ideological, historical, political and contextual climate that underscored it.

2.2.4. The Unions and the Academy

As noted above, much of the literature that directly addresses the issue of the politics of workerism has some serious limitations. A more useful body of literature for this report is provided by scholars whose examination of Fosatu who looked at workerism by analysing the relationship between intellectual work and political struggle. Here the History Workshop in South Africa was a key connection, being closely tied to, and influential in, the independent trade unions – partly as a result of the significant overlap in membership between the two organisations.

As part of this group of authors, Bozzoli and Delius provide an overview of the background to the rise of class analysis as the framework through which history came to be understood in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.¹²¹ (Also See Ch. 4, Sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.) Lewis notes the extent to which the emergent union movement set the agenda of labour historians, claiming that they “certainly inspired the writing of labour history and labour studies at the

¹¹⁹ Isizwe, “Errors of Workerism”

¹²⁰ Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 74

¹²¹ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History”

time”.¹²² This explains the dominant emphasis on “organisational issues of democracy and worker control” in unions,¹²³ and the resultant neglect of issues like culture and conflict in much of the literature. (Lewis’s stress on the intellectual vibrancy of this period, and the links between the Fosatu unions and New Left ideas, regrettably, runs alongside his rather doubtful claim that these unions were marked by a constricting workerism, which itself was defined by “the limitations of a narrow survivalist strategy”).¹²⁴ Saunders provides an overview of the “revisionist” scholarship, exemplified by the History Workshop, and with which workerism was deeply entangled.¹²⁵

Work undertaken by the History Workshop itself¹²⁶ is also interesting in providing some of the intellectual background that shaped many Fosatu workerists. Bozzoli notes how both the workerists and the Workshop attempted to “establish in South Africa a tradition with roots in European and American Society”.¹²⁷ Nash too shows that global processes affecting Europe and America in the 1960s and 1970s came to bear on the South African condition, and were very influential in a context in shaped by the crushing of African political resistance after Sharpeville, the banning of the SACP and ANC, and the resultant political vacuum in their wake. This enabled ideas outside the ANC/SACP canon to have a significant local influence, including in the unions.

Lunn’s recent work is also useful, particularly for attempting to piece together a picture of the intellectual context from which elements of the workerist tradition would emerge. Alongside those identified above, hers is one of the few academic works that explore the New Left influence in South Africa, something that will be expanded here. Similarly, it is an important attempt to understand “how the global became local”,¹²⁸ another aspect of South Africa’s history that, as Lunn herself points out, has been sorely neglected.

¹²² *ibid*

¹²³ Lewis, J. 1983. “South African Labour History: A Historiographical Assessment” in *Radical History Review*, No. 46-47, p. 219

¹²⁴ Lewis, “South African Labour History”, p. 223

¹²⁵ Saunders, C., 1988, *The Making of the South African Past: major historians on race and class*. David Philips Publishers: Cape Town, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/saunders/making-past/ch16.htm>>, no page numbers

¹²⁶ Bozzoli, B. (ed.) 1987. *Class, community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg; Bozzoli, B. (ed.) 1983. *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg; Bozzoli, B. (ed.) 1979. *Labour, Townships and Protest* Ravan Press: Johannesburg

¹²⁷ Bozzoli, “Class Community and Conflict”, p. xiii

¹²⁸ Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”, p. 6

However, while often drawing the connections, this genre of work does not usually place the union movement centre stage. The historiographical accounts and intellectual and cultural histories to which I have referred are not centrally concerned with trade unions or labour history, with the primary focus being on the academic perspectives from which South African history has been written. Because of the historical significance of trade unions associated with Fosatu and its predecessors, reference is often made to them in the context of the broader institutional framework in which they are viewed as but one force among many. Of course, the reason that historiography would contain some important insights is that, in the South African case, many of those making history were also those writing it.

2.2.5. White and Black in Fosatu

A more recent literature has concerned itself with the role of race in Fosatu, and also provides important insights into workerism. It must be stressed at the outset, that while workerists included academics – naturally enough since the main research universities under apartheid were restricted to whites¹²⁹ – some of the most militant and intellectually brilliant workerists were the black “organic intellectuals”¹³⁰.

Since almost all members of the new unions were black, the high visibility of the white intellectuals active in these unions has been a matter of some debate in the literature, with questions being raised about their motives and power.¹³¹ Initially, the debate on this issue revolved around the influence of the white intellectuals and the influence of external bodies (like for example the IAS, usually dominated by whites) on the Fosatu federation. In 1979, Bonner wrote an article in the *South African Labour Bulletin* attempting to address accusations of white domination, by outlining the democratic structure and constitution of Fosatu, stressing its worker-controlled credentials.¹³² In 1984, the issue re-emerged after Mawu expelled four union leaders, leading to a split from Mawu on the East Rand: the

¹²⁹ Most universities under apartheid were for blacks. However, the university system was not just segregated but hierarchical: universities for blacks centred on teaching, produced very little research, and were intolerant of debate; they were closely linked to either the apartheid state or the homeland bureaucracies. They played little role in the “revisionist” literature or in the new unions.

¹³⁰ Although the organic intellectuals were less likely to have direct contact with New Left literature, these ideas did filter into radical thinking more generally, which will be discussed in later chapters.

¹³¹ See the debate between Sakhela Buhlungu and Johann Maree in *Current Sociology* May 2006, No. 54: 3. The debate includes four articles: Buhlungu, S. “Rebels without a Cause of Their Own?: The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94”; Maree, J. “Rebels with Causes: White Officials in Black Trade Unions in South Africa, 1973–94: A Response to Sakhela Buhlungu”; Buhlungu, S. “Whose Cause and Whose History?”; and Maree, J. “Similarities and Differences between Rebels With and Without a Cause”

¹³² Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”

splinter group and several others accused Fosatu of being “dominated by bureaucratic white elite”.¹³³

Recently the debate revived, with an exchange between Sakhela Buhlungu, a former unionist-turned-academic, and Johann Maree, formerly of the (Cape) General Workers Union. Buhlungu began by attempting to problematise the existing literature on the role of white academics in black unions, a literature which he claims is characterised by “political and intellectual silence and avoidance” on the issue of race.¹³⁴ Buhlungu notes that while white officials were able to gain acceptance into, and play a central role in a basically black movement, despite the strained, hostile black-white relations of apartheid, the “social distance”¹³⁵ between white officials on the one hand, and black workers and officials on the other, was never overcome because whites “never fully transcended their history and heritage”.¹³⁶

In his view, the white radicals held power, and “epitomised what one scholar termed ‘a disguised set of claims advancing their own candidacy as a new elite’”.¹³⁷ The language and spatial difference corresponded to a division of labour between white and black in the unions, which benefitted the whites. However, he maintains that this division was simultaneously a source of weakness in that they were “unable to penetrate the world of black workers”.¹³⁸ According to Buhlungu, the development of a layer of politically assertive black officials challenged the dominance of the white leadership who then retreated into “policy-oriented areas” outside the unions.¹³⁹

While Buhlungu’s line of argument broaches a usually tabooed topic – race in the unions – it tends to posit too neat a bifurcation between the white unionists (“a new elite”), and the distinct “world of black workers”: “most populists were black while most workerists were white”, even if “there were a few black workerists and a few white populists”.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ *Work in Progress*. 1984. “Mawu and Ummawsa: Fight for the factories”, No. 33. See Ch. 7, esp. 7.3.2 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

¹³⁴ Buhlungu, “Rebels without a Cause”

¹³⁵ Buhlungu, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

¹³⁶ Buhlungu, *op. cit.*, p. 447

¹³⁷ Buhlungu, *op. Cit.*, p. 440

¹³⁸ *ibid*

¹³⁹ Buhlungu, *op. cit.*, p. 442

¹⁴⁰ Buhlungu, *op. cit.*, p. 430

But the claim that seems to follow – that most whites in Fosatu were workerist and that most blacks were “populist” – simply does not follow. The workerists included a large number of black workers, including prominent Fosatu leaders like Dube, Foster, Mayekiso, Sauls, who played a key role in the development and elaboration of workerism and the “worker control” tradition. Chris Dlamini (who as will be shown, was not a workerist) identified African Fosatu leaders like John Gomomo¹⁴¹ and Moses Mayekiso as vehement workerist critics of the Freedom Charter, arguing against “populism” and the politics of the ANC.¹⁴² Likewise, the shop stewards’ councils or “locals” were an initiative from below, by black workers.¹⁴³ Lastly, as writers like Ulrich,¹⁴⁴ Ndlovu and Sithole¹⁴⁵ and Buhlungu himself have shown,¹⁴⁶ these workers helped create the Tuacc/Fosatu tradition – a tradition dominated by workerism.

Moreover Fosatu (like Tuacc) was profoundly democratic, and it is difficult to conceive that figures that Erwin could have operated in the unions except under the guidance and mandates of the black membership. The praxis of these workerist leaders, white as well as black, was defined by the positions and views of the majority of mandated, representative and elected Central Committee members. Both the national office bearers and the Central Committee were accountable to regular congresses, and subject to oversight by shop steward-based committees, themselves accountable to popular assemblies. Of course, the national office bearers had a substantial influence over the direction of the federation, but this should not be confused with a top-down, directive, power vested in the hands of a tiny, unrepresentative elite. This process interaction allows us to reasonably argue that the views of the Fosatu leadership were also in the main representative of the larger Fosatu (refer to Section 2.2.6 for deeper theoretical analysis).

If that membership was basically “populist”, it could easily have ousted a domineering, non-representative, white workerist clique. Conversely, many of the key polemics against

¹⁴¹ Unfortunately Gomomo died in 2008. Therefore, his workerist credentials cannot be accurately ascertained. However, according to Bonner, based on the commonality of his ideas with those of other Fosatu workerists, Gomomo was a workerist. (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg)

¹⁴² Interview with Chris Dlamini, 12th June 2009, Johannesburg

¹⁴³ For example, Baskin, J. 1982, “Growth of a New Worker Organ – The Germiston Shop Stewards Council” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 7, No. 8

¹⁴⁴ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

¹⁴⁵ Ndlovu and Sithole, “The Revival”

¹⁴⁶ Buhlungu, S. 2001. “Democracy and Modernization in the Making of the South African Movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973-2000”, PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand.

workerism were written by white academics and/or SACP members, including Innes and Von Holdt, as well as SACP ideologues Cronin and Slovo.¹⁴⁷

While there was a certain level of contestation, the worlds and views of the university trained and organic intellectuals blurred, and workerism was a multiracial current. The “workerist-populist” contestation was undoubtedly sometimes infused with racial suspicions. In a polarised society like South Africa, it was easy for “populists” to assume that their workerist rivals were simply a “bureaucratic white elite”,¹⁴⁸ just as workerists could tend to see their rivals as “petty bourgeois”. However, it is impossible to conflate white with workerist and black with “populist”.

It is then, as Legassick has argued, tempting but flawed to read Fosatu and Tuacc through a racial lens.¹⁴⁹ The truth is rather messier. For example, a study of trade union education by Ginsburg shows that rather than a neat divide between (white) “professional” intellectuals by “grassroots” and (black) “movement” intellectuals in education in the 1970s, there was “a convergence between the organic knowledge of the base and the theoretical insights of trained union officials around the importance of intensive factory-based organising and worker control”.¹⁵⁰ Conflict between the two was thus “resolved through a transformative compromise to regard the trade union as a non-political but worker controlled structure”.¹⁵¹

Maree’s response to Buhlungu is also of interest. He agrees with Buhlungu that the white intellectuals occupied a complicated place in the unions, and that there was substantial social distance between the races. However, he stresses that the goals of the white radicals were strong unions, worker control, and a left politics, rather than an elite agenda. By 1979, he suggests, the “most influential leaders” in Fosatu (many of whom were workerists), “were no longer whites”.¹⁵² For Maree, the replacement of white officials with blacks towards the mid-1980s and their entry into other areas of work represented not their defeat by assertive black

¹⁴⁷ The 1986 “Errors of Workerism” was unattributed, but is widely considered to have been written by the SACP’s Jeremy Cronin.

¹⁴⁸ *Work in Progress*. 1984. “Mawu and Ummawsa: Fight for the factories”, No. 33. See Ch. 7, esp. 7.3.2 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

¹⁴⁹ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”

¹⁵⁰ Ginsburg, M. 1997. “Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour Movement” Masters Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p. 88

¹⁵¹ Ginsburg, “Trade Union Education”, p. 58-59

¹⁵² Maree, “Rebels with Causes”

rivals, but rather the *victory* of the “deliberate strategy by white intellectuals in the unions to put control of the unions into the hands of black workers”.¹⁵³

The unions that accepted white officials and leaders, like such those in Tuacc / Fosatu tradition, were very conscious of the complications around their positions; the white leaders thus attempted to entrench democracy and organisation on the shop floor. This was part of a general stress on democracy: “workers control”. The CCOBTU and Cusa unions, which did not admit whites, also did not “pay sufficient attention to the problem of domination of the unions by African leaders, who were usually the secretaries of the unions” i.e. to power relations, racial or otherwise.¹⁵⁴ For Maree, therefore, the white officials were not “rebels without causes”, but rebels with several causes: “to help build a democratic and powerful black trade union movement, to work towards social and economic justice, and to secure their own long-term future in South Africa”.¹⁵⁵

2.2.6. Leadership versus Mass Base: the Iron Law of Oligarchy?

Some of the arguments made in the above discussion require justification given that there is a body of sociological literature dealing with questions of union “bureaucratisation” and “institutionalisation” that intersects with the theme of “leadership vs. base”, and the extent to which there is ever a real confluence of the respective ideas of these groups.

Michels’ so-called “iron law” of “oligarchy” stands centre-stage in this literature.¹⁵⁶ Formerly very close to the syndicalist movement, Michels came to the conclusion that genuine democracy was impossible. Regardless of measures to ensure (or formal commitments to) democratic process, unions, parties and in fact all democratic organisations, invariably end up captured by an elite or “oligarchy”. He located the problem in the technical requirements of organisations: as they grow, the imperatives of efficiency, scale, complexity, and specialisation increase, leading to the development of a leadership cadre. This leadership may present itself as serving the base, and may indeed seek to do so. However, the “oligarchy” also develops interests distinct from the base, which it will protect against the will of the majority. This process is associated with goal displacement, where the leadership becomes

¹⁵³ Maree *op. cit.*, p. 453

¹⁵⁴ Maree, “Rebels with Causes”, p. 461.

¹⁵⁵ Maree, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

¹⁵⁶ Michels, R. 1915. *Political Parties*. Hearst's International Library Co.: New York

more concerned with organisational and personal survival than stated organisational goals and measures. One oligarchy may displace another, but the pattern of oligarchy cannot be ended. Michels concluded that the fate of unions and parties is, in short, elite control, a view that many writers have accepted – sometimes arguing that unions “mature” to become more conservative and less democratic over time.

This has enormous implications: for Michels it suggested that democracy itself was impossible, leading to his later alignment with Italian fascism. In terms of Fosatu, the Michels’ thesis would tend to back up arguments that present workerism as the ideology of a “bureaucratic white elite”,¹⁵⁷ its ideas merely an instrument for “advancing” the “candidacy” of “a new elite”.¹⁵⁸

However, there are some serious problems with Michels’ so-called “iron law”. A growing literature argues that while “oligarchy” is certainly a tendency in mass democratic organisations, there are important counter-tendencies that can mitigate – even prevent – its emergence.¹⁵⁹ Hyman has noted countervailing tendencies to bureaucracy, stressing the “dialectic” of democratic versus oligarchic tendencies in historically specific contexts.¹⁶⁰ Flanders argues that the dominance of union officials can only happen in the absence of “powerful traditions of rank and file autonomy from below”.¹⁶¹ Gouldner used the British shop steward movement of the 1910s and the concurrent Italian Factory councils to propose, indeed, an “iron law of democracy” under rank and file movements.¹⁶² The anarchist and syndicalist tradition also tackled these issues, anticipating many of the points made in later studies.¹⁶³ Rocker, in a classic study of anarcho-syndicalism, compared the anarcho-syndicalist Spanish CNT-FAI¹⁶⁴ with the “moderate” German labour movement. The CNT

¹⁵⁷ *Work in Progress*. 1984. “Mawu and Ummawsa: Fight for the factories”, No. 33. See Ch. 7, esp. 7.3.2 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

¹⁵⁸ Buhlungu, *op. Cit.*, p. 440

¹⁵⁹ See for example Schmidt, A. 1973. *Oligarchy in Fraternal Organizations: A Study in Organizational Leadership*. Gale Research Company: Detroit; Selznick, P. 1943. “An Approach to a Theory of Bureaucracy” in *American Sociological Review*, No. 8; Piven, F. and R. Cloward. 1977. *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. Vintage: New York; Lang, K. and G. Lang. 1961. *Collective Dynamics*. Crowell: New York

¹⁶⁰ Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*

¹⁶¹ Flanders, A. 1972. “What are Trade Unions for?” in McCarthy, W. (ed.). *Trade Unions*. Penguin: Harmondsworth

¹⁶² Cited in Hyman, *Marxism and Trade Unionism*

¹⁶³ See for example Michels, *Political Parties*, part V, chapters 3 and 4

¹⁶⁴ The CNT was the mass-based trade union formation, and the FAI a specifically anarchist political organization linked to the CNT, formed in 1927, dedicated to fighting for the dominance of anarchist ideas within the mass formations.

played a central role in defeating the fascist coup attempt of Franco in 1936 – the first fascist take-over in Europe that was forcibly halted by workers – and in the subsequent Spanish revolution, which saw large-scale collectivisation of agriculture and factories placed under direct workers self-management, largely through CNT structures.¹⁶⁵ By contrast, the large German unions allowed Hitler to take power, and did not managed to defeat his subsequent repression and terror.

For Rocker, the fundamental differences lay in ideology and in structure. Despite having nearly two million members in late 1936, the CNT had a minuscule full-time staff, mainly comprised of the production departments for its enormous press. Further countering “bureaucratic ossification” and conservatism was “the educational work of Anarcho-Syndicalists”, which was “directed toward the development of independent thought and action”; their opposition to “all centralising tendencies” (through the creation of structures that facilitated direct worker control and participation); and their stress on direct action, decentralisation and self-reliance.¹⁶⁶ By contrast, the German trade unions praised top-down leadership and bureaucratic efficiency, and surrendered major political decisions to the small coterie of full time leaders of the German social democratic party.

Sydney and Beatrice Webb’s¹⁶⁷ early study of British trade unions also argued that representative democracy helped in “restoring balance” between the needs of efficiency and democracy. While conceding the tendency of the full-time representative to “alter his manner of life, his habit of mind, and ... intellectual atmosphere”,¹⁶⁸ they argued that the inclusion of rank-and-file workers on committees and assemblies would ensure that full timers are kept in check. More recently, studies have shown not only how bureaucratic tendencies and “moderation” can be prevented, but also *reversed*. For instance, Voss and Sherman¹⁶⁹ showed how internal “political crises”, combined with the influx of outsiders with different organising traditions, plus “centralised pressure” from the international union movement

¹⁶⁵ Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*

¹⁶⁶ Rocker, *Anarcho-syndicalism*, p. 22. An important insight raised by Rocker in relation to this point is that immersion in state structures in contrast the its inevitability in organisations of the working class), because they are inherently and always centralised in form, promotes and deepens bureaucracy – a point which would have resonated with many workerists.

¹⁶⁷ Webb, S. and B. [1897] 1920. *Industrial Democracy*. Longmans Green: London

¹⁶⁸ Webb S and B cited in Maree, J. 1982. “Democracy and oligarchy in trade unions: The independent trade unions in the Transvaal and the Western Province General Workers’ union in the 1970s” in *Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 43

¹⁶⁹ Voss, K., and R. Sherman. 2000. “Breaking the iron law of oligarchy: Union revitalization in the American labor movement” in *American Journal of Sociology*, No. 106, p. 305

helped to radicalise and revitalise the American unions, demonstrating “the potential for movements to break out of bureaucratic conservatism”.¹⁷⁰

Voss and Sherman¹⁷¹ and Milkman and Voss¹⁷² also highlight the possibilities of democratisation stemming from centralised union initiatives and even top down processes, including the “purging” of stubborn and resistant organisers.¹⁷³ In addition, as has been suggested by Ostergaard, “if the leadership and membership have different expressed goals, then the membership may in fact reject the legitimacy of the leadership”¹⁷⁴ – which suggests that even the most oligarchic leadership is never fully insulated.

Van der Walt and Schmidt use many of these sources to raise three important critiques of Michels’ arguments; namely, that it is “excessively deterministic and teleological in character”, that it ignores that “an oligarchic organisation may, under some circumstances, develop into a more democratic one”, that “democratic and decentralised structures” alongside a “strongly democratic culture among the rank and file act as checks on oligarchic tendencies”.¹⁷⁵

This literature thus provides an important corrective to attempts to present Michels’ “iron law” as a universal truth, or to try present workerism as the ideology of a supposed Fosatu bureaucracy, and directs attention to the necessity of taking seriously the impact of the workerists’ commitment to workers control on the new unions.

These sources make a strong case in favour of a more nuanced view of the leadership/base thesis, thereby supporting the claim made in this report about a strong and definite convergence of ideas between the leadership and the base in Fosatu. Those factors cited as important (widespread radical education, the existence of strong democratic structures, a democratic culture and politics that prizes workers autonomy) were all hallmarks of Fosatu.

¹⁷⁰ Voss and Sherman, “*Breaking the Iron Law*”

¹⁷¹ Voss and Sherman, “*Overcoming Oligarchy*”

¹⁷² Milkman, R. and K. Voss. 2004. *Rebuilding Labour: Organising and Organisers in the New Union Movement*. Cornell University Press: USA

¹⁷³ Milkman and Voss, *op cit.* p. 7. See also Van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 188-189

¹⁷⁴ Ostergaard, P. 2006. “Overcoming Oligarchy: Culture and Agency in Social Movement Organizations” in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, No. 51, p. 626

¹⁷⁵ van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

There is also concrete case material on the workerist tradition that bears these arguments out. Maree¹⁷⁶ for example, challenged Michels by demonstrating how the potentially “oligarchic” IAS/TUACC structures were held in check through the creation of democratic structures and by developing the capacity of ordinary workers to “compel democratic practices”.¹⁷⁷ This enabled them to be effectively democratised (indeed, radicalised), laying the basis for FOSATU. He concluded that:¹⁷⁸

...tendencies towards democracy and oligarchy are both present in trade unions... Neither democracy nor oligarchy establishes a permanent or decisive hegemony although either can dominate for a considerable time. The forces that determine the dominance of oligarchic or democratic tendencies may be either internal or external to the unions.

Politics was crucial: according to Maree, a key force behind the democratic drive was the commitment of “intellectuals and other leaders to democracy”¹⁷⁹ – which directly challenges the leadership vs. base hypothesis. Likewise, Ulrich’s work on TUACC highlights the commitment to nationally-based industrial unions, strong factory floor organisation, worker control and a “tight” federation:

‘Workers control’ is a unique approach based on non-racial, industrial trade unions, which are democratically organised on the factory floor. Such unions, which are ideally controlled by elected worker representatives at all levels and united nationally on the basis of sharing common policies and resources, create the basis for an autonomous movement that promotes the interest of workers.¹⁸⁰

As a point of qualification, it could be asked how – if workerism had been so successfully infused into the fabric of the mass base of the federation – alternative ideas came to predominate not long after the formation of Cosatu in 1985 (along with considerable support

¹⁷⁶ Maree, “Democracy and Oligarchy”

¹⁷⁷ Maree, *op. cit.*, p. 52. Although Maree later reversed this opinion by analysing COSATU after 1994 (See Maree, J. 2013. “COSATU, oligarchy and the consolidation of democracy in an African context” in Buhlungu, S. and Tshoaedi, M. (eds.). *COSATU’s Contested Legacy*. Brill: South Africa), this does not in fact negate his earlier arguments – especially if Rucker’s assertion that participation in state structures *does* reinforce hierarchy. This is because COSATU’s later participation in tripartite and policy making structures represents a break with the Fosatu tradition.

¹⁷⁸ Maree, “Democracy and Oligarchy”, p. 45

¹⁷⁹ Maree, *op. cit.*, p. 52

¹⁸⁰ Ulrich, “Only the workers”, p. viii

for a largely non-workerists leadership that began to pursue multi-class alliances and links with the ANC). The reality is, despite its democratic structures and impressive commitment to education and a radical counter-culture (those factors that should have sustained the dominance of workerist ideas within the mass base over time), workerists lacked the platform/organisational means to aggressively agitate for their ideas amongst the mass base. That is, they were not organised *as workerists* – in a formation specifically formed for the consistent advocacy of workerism amongst the rank and file. This, as Ndlozi has reflected, allowed the opposing bloc to successfully turn Fosatu’s democratic structures – created by workerists – against workerism, culminating in their ultimate defeat.¹⁸¹ (See Chapter 9 for more on this, esp. 9.2.2.)

2.3. Literature Review Conclusion

There is no doubt that the issue of workerism was and still is a highly contentious issue – both within Fosatu in the 1980s, the labour movement generally, and in the academic literature that puts Fosatu in focus. However, drawing solely from the literature makes understanding the ideological and political positions (or lack thereof) of the workerists within Fosatu’s leadership virtually impossible. It is obvious that there is something about their ideology and political position that has made them the topic for persistent and highly controversial debate, up until now very little has been done to clear up some of the inconsistencies and confusion that surrounds them. This lacuna underpins the central concern of this report.

The chapter has also suggested that the context in which the workerists were operating is important: the global “cultural revolution” and the rise of the New Left has been neglected (or misunderstood) in most studies dealing with the independent trade unions. Literature that does pick up on this influence does not foreground workerism, or trade union’s and their leaders, or radicals specifically, given that they concern themselves primarily with historiography. This report is therefore an attempt at bringing together these two elements: simultaneously expanding on the New Left in South Africa (which was a core element of Fosatu’s influence), including the way in which its insights were blended with the traditions

¹⁸¹ Ndlozi, M. 2010. “Trade Unionism in South Africa: A critical assessment of trade union strategy. The case of the CWIU, 1987-1999”. Masters Research Report: University of the Witwatersrand

and insights of indigenous unions and activists, while retaining the focus on the emerging trade unions and being situated within the genre of labour history.

This report is also aimed at problematising and transcending the tradition, dominant in South African labour studies, that studies labour relations, strikes and disputes independently from the overall political and ideological tradition or doctrine in which they were conceived. As an alternative, this report argues that these issues cannot be understood in isolation from the overall approach of the movement through which they came into existence; and, as such cannot be adequately understood unless in relation to the overarching *political* approach of the labour movement responsible for them.

2.4. Methodological Framework

This research falls broadly within a growing interdisciplinary matrix of historically oriented social sciences; it could be situated within the ambit of industrial sociology, or labour history.¹⁸² Indeed it is becoming more and more difficult to draw clear distinctions between the disciplines.¹⁸³

This project has some limitations, one of which could revolve around the fact that it was narrowly concerned with elaborating the politics and ideas of Fosatu's leadership (to the exclusion of the base). It necessarily ignores the extent to which ordinary members diverged or overlapped with the leadership's views, how they interpreted Fosatu positions etc. This is indeed a necessary task, that would provide valuable insight into the topic, but it is not feasible in a study, given time, length and scope limitations of a report at this level. It would be a valuable subject for further, future research.

2.5. Research Methods

Because workerism is not adequately understood, it is necessary to re-examine the views of its protagonists, through primary research. In doing so, I have chosen to use a combination of oral testimony and documentary analysis. Ulrich points out that these are the most frequently

¹⁸² Skocpol, T. 1982. "Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology," in Skocpol (ed.). *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom, pp. 356-386

¹⁸³ Skocpol, *op. cit.*, p. 359

deployed methods for collecting data by scholars interested in the “emerging unions” in South Africa.¹⁸⁴ This is because many of the key figures are still available to interview.

Archival documents of the Fosatu era meanwhile provide an important supplement and corrective to oral testimony. The popularity of these two in studies of the 1970s and 1980s unions is testimony to their usefulness and applicability (See Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2).

The purpose of combining multiple methods (‘triangulation’)¹⁸⁵ relates chiefly to securing the reliability and accuracy of the gathered data, given that both interviews and documentary sources are prone to distortions, elisions and errors. Thus, according to Bouchard, agreement between data generated by two methods “enhances our belief that the results are valid and not a methodological artefact”.¹⁸⁶ Because triangulation is “largely a vehicle for cross validation when two or more distinct methods are found to be congruent and yield comparable data”,¹⁸⁷ it is an appropriate methodological tool for this project.

The main sources of evidence that I have used include, then, in-depth interviews with key informants, and the analysis of a variety of documentary materials: besides unpublished material from the Fosatu archives, I have also examined its publications (notably *Fosatu Worker News*), and other contemporaneous media. The most useful of these has proven to be the *South African Labour Bulletin*, a voice of the unions and labour support bodies (having its roots in the IIE), and the product of some of the same individuals that are the central focus of this study¹⁸⁸. Because the *South African Labour Bulletin* contains valuable articles written at the time, by, and therefore containing the ideas of workerist leaders, certain *South African Labour Bulletin* articles may be considered primary sources.

Over the course of the research it also became clear from interviews and preliminary document analysis that Fosatu’s education curriculum was an especially valuable source of data collection, because it yielded the most important clues to the “politics” of the workerists. The reason for this was that it was the individual workerist leaders themselves who wrote the

¹⁸⁴ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

¹⁸⁵ Denzin, N. K. 1978 *The Research Act*. McGraw-Hill: New York

¹⁸⁶ Bouchard, T. J. 1976 “Unobtrusive Measures: An inventory of uses” in *Sociological Research and Methods*, No. 4268

¹⁸⁷ Jick, T.D. 1979. “Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in action” in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4, p. 602

¹⁸⁸ As has been mentioned, *South African Labour Bulletin* was established in 1975 in the wake of the Durban strikes, as a continuation of the work of the Institute for Industrial Education (Interview with Eddie Webster, 20 November 2010, Johannesburg).

bulk of Fosatu's taught material, and it was through Fosatu education that political ideas were most explicitly elaborated. Therefore, this material was also closely examined.

However, a complication presents itself here: one cannot view the workerist commitment to worker education without a discussion of the contributions made by the various labour support bodies to Fosatu's education programme. For example, Fosatu's education programmes contained material written by both the IIE and IAS, and were also indebted to various other educational bodies like the Sached Trust, and Learn and Teach. Thus, Motala, for example, who facilitated "dozens of workshops"¹⁸⁹ on behalf of Fosatu, was never actually an office bearer in the federation.¹⁹⁰ Others who did not sit on the Fosatu CC, but who were closely linked to worker education in the federation, include Bonner and Webster.

This use of outside sources might seem to shed doubt on the alignment of the political positions contained in Fosatu's educational material with workerism specifically. However the content of this material, even if not always written by workerists, was chosen by them, which itself gives clues as to their own political positions. Moreover, Fosatu stipulated that external teachers and resources "have to have *a political position close to ours* and be knowledgeable",¹⁹¹ which allows us to reasonably assume that ideas promoted in educative material corresponded fairly closely with those of the workerists, and can thus be used as a basis to better understand workerism. Interviews figures like Bonner, Motala and Webster seemed to confirm this.

While a combination of interviews and document analysis are the most appropriate methods for the purposes of this research, they also contain limitations (see below), which raise certain challenges. Care has been taken over the course of this report to remain aware of these limitations, and to avoid the generation and reproduction of errors.

2.5.1. Oral Testimony

2.5.1.1. Justification

This research is concerned with the investigation and elaboration of the politics of an influential group of trade unionists. Thus, the data required for analysis was a set of *ideas* –

¹⁸⁹ Telephone Interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*

¹⁹¹ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report by the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984, no page numbers, emphasis added

those of a particular group of people at a specific period in time still in living memory. The obvious methodological choice was therefore oral testimony through semi-structured interviews, most importantly because this method allows the researcher to direct elicitation of specific kinds of information from respondents,¹⁹² but also because these activists are best positioned to communicate their own politics and analyses. According to La Hausse, oral testimony is uniquely useful for its ability to recover the “subjective popular experiences of social change wrought within living memory”;¹⁹³ this was particularly relevant in my project, since it concerned itself centrally with such experiences and with how social change was interpreted by individuals. Likewise, as Blee and Taylor note, “interviews have always been central to social movement research as a means of generating data about the motives of people who participate in protest and activities”.¹⁹⁴

The semi-structured interview format was chosen on the basis that it provided the flexibility to probe topics and issues as they arose during interviews, whilst remaining within a structure. This was important, since it helped capture textured and detailed information about the ideas and histories of individual respondents, and how these ideas shifted over time.

2.5.1.2. Limitations

While the benefits are notable, this method also presents various limitations, many of which were confronted in this project. For La Hausse, one of the most pertinent of these relates to the variability and fallibility of oral testimony, and the tendency for respondents to romanticise the past.¹⁹⁵ Minkley and Rassool point to a similar limitation by stating, “human memory is given to error, misconception, elision, distortion, elaboration and downright fabrication”.¹⁹⁶ The limitations of the actual interview process – shaped by power relations, social characteristics, language and translation – are also important to note.

Although a certain level of authenticity and legitimacy has to be accorded to the recollections of respondents, the information given was often imperfect. The most pertinent problem was

¹⁹² Blee, M. and V. Taylor. 2002. “Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research” in B. Klandermans, B and S. Staggenborg (eds.). *Methods of Social Movement Research*. University of Minnesota Press: United States, p. 92; Berg, B. 1998. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Allyn and Bacon: Boston.

¹⁹³ La Hausse, P. 1990. “Oral History and the South African Historians” in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7, p. 345

¹⁹⁴ Blee and Taylor, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁵ La Hausse, “Oral History”

¹⁹⁶ Minkley and Rassool cited in Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

that very few respondents have remained in the labour movement, having taken up very senior positions in the state or private sector. Many might therefore be expected to have altered their ideas and opinions, along with their class position, and might now look upon the ideas they held in the 1970s or 1980s as expressions of naiveté, or undue idealism. But even without such a social shift, the past tends to be viewed through the eyes of the present: as Webster pointed out, “I tend to think about the relationship between people’s ideas and their practice, so I find it difficult not to think about them then when I think about them now”.¹⁹⁷

Despite my attempts to emphasise my interest in the opinions held “back then”, it was obvious that in many cases respondents were unwilling, perhaps unconsciously, to be entirely frank about parts of their own histories. Some respondents downplayed the extent to which they subscribed to radical socialist ideas, and to criticisms of the ANC - yet this is clearly contradicted by the documentary evidence. There was also a tendency for people to repeat and reproduce the dominant narrative – of ANC triumphalism, which in a way assumes the errors of workerism – and this undoubtedly featured in some of the interview data. In many instances there were also contradictions *within* interviews, such as admitting at one point to have adhered to a particular set of ideas, while denying such adherence at others, and also between the recollections of the various respondents with regard to opinions held by the workerist group. This is surely partly a product of the fallibility etc. of memory described above.

Although these problems cannot, of course, be completely eliminated, by remaining conscious of these issues, and by making note of issues that I felt required verification, I was able to deal with these concerns. A substantial element in *any* research relies on the instinct of the researcher, and I have crosschecked oral testimonies against one other, and also against the documentary evidence, to iron out as many inconsistencies as possible.

Because many of the respondents in this study now occupy prominent positions in government, access to respondents was a challenge. It was not always easy to locate respondents and to establish times for interviews. However, I was fortunate in that Historical Papers at Wits recently hosted a Fosatu exhibition, which drew together many of the workerists as panellists and this was immensely helpful in securing contacts. Special thanks

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

must also go to Prof. Phil Bonner, who was kind enough to assist me with introductions. Many of these figures have not been interviewed about the workerist period for many years.

2.5.2. Documentary Evidence

2.5.2.1. Justification

Archival evidence is not prone to the same level of historical fallibility as human memory, since it remains unaltered from the point at which it was recorded. According to Bailey, “unobtrusive methods” like archival research “are often suitable... when the researcher desires to use multiple methods, with one measure serving as a check on the other”.¹⁹⁸ Archival data is therefore an important supplement to semi-structured interviews. It does however have its own limitations (see below).

Archival evidence has proven extremely valuable, and particular gratitude in this regard must be extended to those involved with the Historical Papers at Wits, which houses a large Fosatu collection, as well as those at the Trade Union Library (TULEC), run by the Labour Research Service at Community House in Cape Town. These sources were supplemented by documents from the Taffy Adler Collection and other holdings. Because there are in excess of 143 boxes on Fosatu in the Wits’ Historical Papers alone, choices had to be made with regards the selection of documents. Given my focus, I prioritised Fosatu’s educational material, the CC and Exco meeting minutes, official Fosatu policy documents, and office bearer reports.

Educational material and course outlines developed for Fosatu worker education proved exceptionally useful because Fosatu’s leadership was centrally concerned with the development of a “working class movement”,¹⁹⁹ and held that central to this was the creation of a “working class” political consciousness and identity. Education therefore, was crucial to the Fosatu programme, and educational materials yielded important data with regards to what exactly was taught, and therefore, the political orientation of those that selected and taught it.

I have also drawn from Fosatu publications and journals, including *Fosatu Worker News* and *Fosatu Press Digest*, as well as from other contemporaneous journals that dealt

¹⁹⁸ Bailey, KC. 1994, *Methods of Social Research*. The Free Press: United States, p. 265

¹⁹⁹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle: Where does Fosatu Stand? Occasional Publication, No. 5, 1982, p. 7

sympathetically with labour, including the *South African Labour Bulletin*, *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, *Isizwe* and *Work in Progress*, many of which have now been published online by the DISA (Digital Archive South Africa) project. Because of the embargo limitations placed on government records – at least twenty years, often more for political surveillance records – I was unable to use these in this report.

2.5.2.2. Limitations

Although far more accurate than oral testimony, archival data is by no means completely reliable. First, it is also prone to inaccuracies, being produced by people. Secondly, as Mariampolski and Hughes note, “enormous biases pervade historical remnants”, which is the result of “*whose* materials are preserved and *what* experiences are recorded”.²⁰⁰ The central problem in using primary data sources is that “data collection and transmission procedures are beyond the control of the researcher”,²⁰¹ particularly applicable in the case of my research.

The problem described above is compounded by the fact that documentary evidence concerning the politics of those in Fosatu’s leadership, if more accurate than interviews (in the sense that they are a direct record of the positions held at the time), is relatively thin. Given the heavy repression of the period under question, including laws forbidding the propagation of “communism” (defined very loosely in the 1953 Suppression of Communism Act), and the requirements placed on trade unions under the provisions of registration to submit many of their records to the government on an on-going basis, there was a tendency for minutes not to include in writing anything that might evoke repression, or underline the political ambitions of Fosatu and its leadership. Indeed, several interviewees noted that political discussion was generally held in informal settings *outside* the workplace, and *outside* the formal decision-making structures, although obviously it affected decisions in those structures.

As van der Linden points out, for strategic and practical reasons, trade unions often deliberately conceal their political orientation, thereby giving the *impression* of “economism”.²⁰² Maree also mentions this self-imposed political censorship, claiming that minutes of meetings during this period were sometimes deliberately written to conceal

²⁰⁰ Miriamposki, H and D. Hughes. 1978. "The Use of Personal Documents in Historical Sociology" in *The American Sociologist*, No. 13, p. 110, emphasis in original

²⁰¹ Miriamposki and Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 106

²⁰² Van Der Linden, *Workers of the World*

information.²⁰³ In the late apartheid context, in which African and non-racial trade unions were given a recognised legal status (as an effort to depoliticise them), it was seen as essential for unions to overtly distance themselves from banned political organisations like the ANC and SACP, and to refrain from making overtly political statements (especially anti-capitalist “communist” ones). According to Webster this sort of activity was understood by workerists to amount to political suicide and was heavily frowned upon.²⁰⁴

This provides a probable explanation for the ambiguity evident in several Fosatu articles, publications and addresses. Foster’s political address at the 1982 Fosatu congress, entitled “Where Does Fosatu Stand?” is a case in point. Its ambiguity has been noted before by both Lambert and Plaut,²⁰⁵ and there is no doubt that this was at least partially responsible for the confusion and controversy surrounding Fosatu. What it means for methodological understanding is that the political positions of Fosatu’s leaders are very rarely spelled out explicitly, systematically or programmatically in Fosatu documents, prompting a need for some reconstruction in my analysis.

2.6. Sampling

As Shuman notes, sampling is important in that it allows for the produced data to be representative of a broader population.²⁰⁶ Where this is the desired outcome, probability or scientific sampling should be utilised since this minimises the reproduction of errors by creating a situation where everyone in the population in question has an equal chance of selection. However, in my case this is not really the objective.

Rather, as Maxwell points out, non-probability and purposive sampling is more useful here because it allows for the choosing of respondents who will be able to provide specific information, as opposed to information that is verifiably representative of a far larger population.²⁰⁷ Since my research deals with a small group of activists and generalisability is

²⁰³ Maree, J. 1986. *An Analysis of the Independent Trade Unions in South Africa in the 1970s*. PhD Dissertation: University of Cape Town

²⁰⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁰⁵ Lambert, R. 1988. *Political Unionism in South Africa: The Congress of South African Trade Unions, 1955-1965*. PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand; Plaut, M. 1992. “Debates in a Shark Tank: The politics of South Africa’s non-racial trade unions” in *African Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 364

²⁰⁶ Shuman, H. 2002. “Sense and Nonsense about Surveys” in *Contexts*, Vol. 40, No. 7

²⁰⁷ Maxwell, J. A. 1998. ‘Designing a Qualitative Study’ in Bickman, L and D. Rog (eds.). 2008. *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, 2nd edn. Sage Publications: California

mostly inconsequential, the selections were made based on these sampling techniques because they are recognised to “enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups’ experience(s)”.²⁰⁸ This strategy was supplemented by snowball sampling for difficult-to-reach respondents, as well as for identifying others commonly associated with workerism – purposes for which snowball sampling is particularly appropriate.²⁰⁹

I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with key informants. Selections were generally made using two criteria: first, the respondents’ position as an office bearer or official in Fosatu’s CC, or their association with Fosatu’s CC through education programmes, labour support and other groups; and second, their reputation as a workerist in Fosatu. Respondents were mostly chosen, then, on the basis that they seemed to represent the typical cases. It must be noted however that one respondent, Petros Mashishi, fitted none of these categories, although he was an influential worker leader in Fosatu, later elected president of the Samwu, and President of Cosatu – and accessible and available for an interview. Only one respondent, Motala, was identified through snowball sampling, on the basis that another workerist respondent identified his ideas as congruent with those held by the workerist group.

This approach to sampling has one major limitation: that the conclusions I have drawn with regards workerism are essentially a reflection of the common positions of the sixteen respondents interviewed, cross-checked against archival evidence. In this sense, the definition of workerism that I develop is based on the ideas of these sixteen workerists only. It may not represent the opinions of every single person associated with the workerist label, either within Fosatu or beyond. However, given that the fifteen I interviewed can reasonably be viewed as the pre-eminent workerists, I would argue that their views can be seen as fairly typical of others associated with workerism. The definition and discussion that I have drawn can thus be broadly applicable to most workerists. Although several respondents stressed that Fosatu’s leadership could not be described to have adhered to an homogenous political standpoint, there was in fact a general cohesion in the views of the workerist leaders, and I took care to note (and check) when (or whether) political ideas and positions were held in common amongst the so-call workerist leaders in Fosatu.

²⁰⁸ Devers, K. and R. Frankel. 2002 “Study Design in Qualitative Research: sampling and data collection strategies” in *Education for Health*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 264

²⁰⁹ Greenstein, R et al. 2003. *Research Methods Training Manual*. Unpublished paper.

Some difficulties were encountered in establishing who exactly was commonly associated with the workerist label (in the literature and polemics) because these individuals are not always named individually. As a result of this, it was inevitable that certain respondents (Chris Dlamini and Petros Mashishi, selected at the time for their supposed workerism) could not actually be considered to fit into this group (See sections 6.4, esp. p. 154 and 6.6, esp. p. 165). Nevertheless, the interview with these individuals was important, as it allowed me to distinguish what workerism was *not*, and thus distinguish between those who should be included workerist camp and those who shouldn't. This then was ultimately important in order to redefine workerism.

2.7. Conclusion

This report is based on a combination of semi-structured interviews with key informants, associated with the workerist label in the 1970s and 1980s, and on archival evidence drawn from the Wits Historical Papers, TULEC and elsewhere. There are important limitations to both of these sources. Oral testimony, due to its reliance on memory, is prone to distortions and inaccuracies. Because this project is based on the ideas held over thirty years ago by a group of individuals, and which have changed significantly since then, as has the political situation in the country, the reliability of some of the oral evidence is questionable. In order to compensate for this, in addition to gaining access to additional information, I have crosschecked data generated in the interview process against archival material in order to tease out any inconsistencies. Despite this, the problem was by no means completely resolved given that archival evidence on the topic is thin. Fosatu often presented itself, misleadingly, as less political than it was, and self-censorship within Fosatu was because the federation operated in repressive circumstances and Fosatu's leaders were under surveillance. Overall, however, it has been possible to develop an extensive discussion of the ideas of the workerists, a matter to which I now turn.

Chapter 3

3. A Workerist Current?

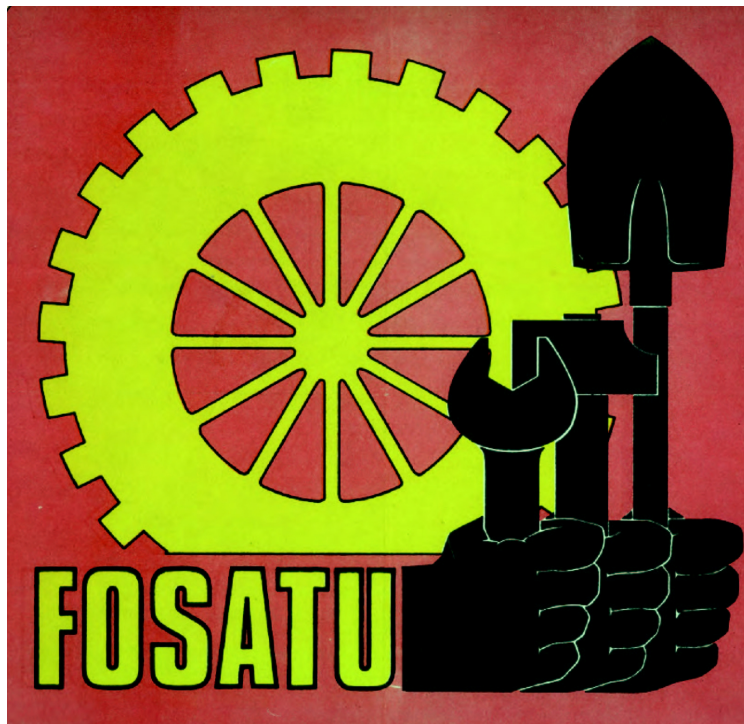


Figure 3. Fosatu Logo. Fosatu Archives. AH 2680/H5

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the approach taken in attempting to define workerism and delineating those in Fosatu's leadership that can be considered workerist. It is restated that despite the a certain amount of heterogeneity on some issues, workerism can be considered a useful description of a distinctive political tendency based on the existence of commonly held ideas. These were not always formulated into a coherent programme and corresponding doctrine, or into a written, fixed programme. However, this pragmatism, eclecticism and tendency to downplay systematic theory should *itself* be seen as a defining feature of workerism, and its distinctive praxis.

Workerism evolved in a particular context, and out of a particular set of traditions and histories. This chapter therefore also comprises a preliminary discussion about the origins of the workerist current as they were drawn from the various traditions that merged to produce

it: first, a unique organisational tradition developed by Tuacc and the GFWBF centred on autonomous, democratic, non-racial, national, industrial unions organised into a “tight” federation pooling resources and sharing policies; second, a political tradition based on pragmatic and flexibility engineered in the Cape Motor Unions; and third, a particular brand of Leftism – deeply influenced by the international New Left movement – and sharply contrasting to the historically dominant socialist politics of the SACP/Sactu in South Africa.

3.2. Who were the workerists?

I have argued in chapter 2 that Fosatu’s leadership is usually identified as exemplifying workerism – which provides the basis for their selection as the focus of this study on workerism. That said, it must also be noted that while this relatively small group can be taken as representative of workerism, it obviously does not include everybody who identified with the tendency, or who were identified with the label, or who held the same basic ideas. Fosatu (and its predecessors, notably Tuacc) were not politically homogenous. Not all workerists were necessarily members of Fosatu, and conversely, nor should *all* Fosatu leaders be considered workerist given that Fosatu comprised some “populists” as well.

At the same time, one should be careful of setting up – as some writers have tended to do (see last chapter, section 2.2.5) a sharp split between the ideas and politics of the Fosatu leadership and the Fosatu mass membership, or between white and black workerists, or between the workerist leaders and the base.

Several authors have pointed to “two camps” within Fosatu’s leadership. Ulrich, for example, shows that with the inclusion of ex-Sactu activists into Tuacc (notably Bheki Nxasana and Alpheus Mthethwa), two distinct and opposing traditions emerged amongst its ranks: those who argued for a politically independent workers movement, which we can identify with workerism, which stressed “worker control” of the unions, rather than union subordination to political parties or union bureaucracies; and those who urged an alliance with the ANC, which we can identify with “populism”, “Charterism” and the Congress/ANC tradition. She argues that these two currents always co-existed, which means that the “workerist-populist” debate was not simply a debate *between* Fosatu and its critics, but also a debate *within* Fosatu. Ginsburg, in his evaluation of trade union education, also speaks of an internal conflict in Fosatu, where he alludes to the role of “movement” intellectuals with an ANC

background or affiliation in contesting the union education promoted by the Fosatu workerists in shop stewards' councils or "locals", and through their own education initiatives in the townships.

However, the fact remains that Fosatu leaders took their mandate from highly democratic union structures, and were subject to extensive "workers control", and the views of the leadership in Fosatu were shaped from below by ordinary workers. Because Fosatu was structured in a way that ensured democratic decision-making, the decisions taken by the federation were not enforced from above by a few all-powerful directors; rather, their praxis was defined by the positions and views of the majority of mandated, representative and elected Central Committee members. Both the National Office Bearers and the Central Committee were accountable to regular congresses, and subject to oversight by shop steward-based committees, themselves accountable to popular assemblies.

We can thus reasonably argue that the views of the Fosatu leadership were also in the main representative of the larger Fosatu, since it would be unreasonable in this context to assume that workerist politics were adopted without the active support of a very large section of Fosatu. Therefore, if "populist" currents existed in Fosatu (and Tuacc), the dominant view was always that of workerism – even amongst the African base.

3.3. Methodological Approaches to Identifying a Workerist Current

How then, do we start to unpack the politics of workerism? Pinning down the politics of a group of trade unionists, which are commonly said to constitute a tendency but which is a tendency whose key features have not been clearly defined in the literature is not simple. As is shown in chapter 2, the existing literature is incoherent and contradictory, and cannot as currently constituted enable one to ascertain exactly what the core characteristics of workerism were in the first place. But in addition, very few groups are made up of individuals with wholly identical political inclinations, ideas and approaches. Furthermore, Fosatu drew its membership and leadership from a wide variety of individuals who traced their heritage to an even wider set of circumstances, movements and ideologies. What immediately presents itself as a problem is therefore that Fosatu's leadership now and again showed significant divergences, sometimes regarding key issues, between key office bearers, despite the decisiveness of workerism to Fosatu's leadership.

In addition, workerism was never formally expressed through a specific political organisation (i.e. some sort of formal workerist ideological or political formation, with a stated programme and politics) or even in a single, set political programme. Its leaders were influential members of the leading trade union federation, Fosatu, operating in difficult circumstances, under high levels of repression, and were often focussed primarily in the short-term with immediate challenges of building trade unions and organising workers: “we didn’t have the time to think or discuss... in a way that I think would have happened in an earlier generation”.²¹⁰ This also limited the extent to which they systematically developed and debated their views.

This chapter begins this task by setting out some general lines of approach in ascertaining the core characteristics of workerism.

To begin with, two central questions were posed. Firstly, what is the minimum level of coherence needed for the concept or category to be useful? And secondly, based on the above, was there a sufficient level of coherence and uniqueness amongst Fosatu’s central leadership to claim that workerism (or whatever one chooses to call it) actually existed within it?²¹¹ Based on extensive interviews and analysis of key records and documents, I argue that a workerist tendency can in fact be discerned within Fosatu’s leadership, in which agreement with certain crucial questions, as well as commonly held ideas and a common approach to praxis, *was* evident – although these were not always formulated into a coherent programme and corresponding doctrine, or into a written, fixed programme (See Ch. 5-8 for discussion of its core elements).

Only after these questions are adequately resolved could the task of redefinition begin, from where it became possible to establish those individuals that could be included, and those that must be excluded from the category. This was done by systematically filling the concept with meaningful characteristics common to the workerists, which required, again, the

²¹⁰ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²¹¹ There is no easy answer to these questions, and the problem cannot be simply quantified. However, I have approached this question by stipulating that workerism would only be useful if it denoted a set of shared characteristics *unique* to a *sizable* group (one or two people cannot be said to constitute a “tendency”) within Fosatu’s leadership. See Goertz, G. 2006. *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey; Copi, IM and C. Cohen. 1990. *Introduction to Logic*, Macmillan: United States, for a discussion of concept building.

establishment of criteria sufficiently common, or inclusive, to those representative of the category, and simultaneously exclusive that they are unique to it when compared to those outside. Thus, the problem revolved around determining criteria that were *both* necessary *and* sufficient, and sufficiently unique.²¹²

3.4. Identifying a Workerist Current

The approach used was to analyse the politics of identified workerists using a deductive method; i.e. by studying the views actually articulated by the key representatives of workerism – the Fosatu leadership – as opposed to the various views attributed to them by others. Some Fosatu leaders I interviewed embraced the workerist label, but most were uncomfortable with it – or rejected it outright. Horn, for example, claimed to be “proud” to adopt the label, whereas Bonner, Erwin and various others rejected it arguing that “as a label, it misrepresents”.²¹³ This makes self-identification problematic as a tool for categorisation.

I therefore approached the problem by referring back to the origins of the term. The term workerism must be defined according to those characteristics that are *dominant* amongst individuals in Fosatu’s leadership, who in turn represented the *dominant* set of ideas held in the federation. In other words, because the dominant ideas – those that came to define Fosatu’s praxis – are the root of the workerist label, workerism must be defined accordingly. Marginal ideas, those that were not held in common by a majority of Fosatu’s leadership, and did not define its praxis, cannot be considered characteristic of workerism.

One of the possible objections to this approach is that Fosatu’s praxis did not remain static. As we have seen, Fosatu became increasingly involved in the anti-apartheid struggles of township communities as the years progressed, although it is not possible to identify any sharp ruptures in the politics of these workerists in the period under review. Rather, this an evolution of thought *within* the larger framework of workerist thought.

Finally, it should be noted that this study is an attempt to understand, as rigorously as possible, the politics of the workerists. It is envisaged not as a closure of debate but as an

²¹² Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*

²¹³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

addition and contribution to the start of a more constructively constituted discussion and debate than that found in so much of the existing literature.

3.5. Tuacc, the Cape Motor Unions and the Various Union Traditions

Workerism did not emerge in a vacuum. It evolved in a particular context, and out of a particular set of traditions and histories. This section comprises a preliminary discussion about the origins of the workerist current as they were drawn from the various traditions that merged to produce it, as a backdrop to forthcoming discussion centred on rigorous analysis of the key characteristics of workerism.

3.5.1. A Unique Organisational Approach: the “worker-control tradition”

Fosatu was deeply shaped by the politics of earlier bodies, most notably the Tuacc and GFWBF, which “developed trade union traditions that were not only distinct from other unregistered trade union bodies in the early 1970s, but also from unregistered trade unions of the past”.²¹⁴

It is useful, then, to take the first steps towards an understanding of the key features of workerism through an examination of the “distinct tradition” pioneered by the Durban-based GFWBF and Tuacc, as outlined by Ulrich.²¹⁵ This tradition was adopted at the formation of Fosatu, and provides a basis on which to begin with the task of building the concept of workerism, given that many of its core features were incorporated into Fosatu. These, according to Ulrich, hinged on a commitment to non-racialism, combined with a strategy focused on nationally-based industrial unions, strong factory floor organisation, worker control and “tight” federation. This enabled “workers control,” based on unions “democratically organised on the factory floor,” controlled by elected worker representatives at all levels,” and forming the “basis for an autonomous movement that promotes the interest of workers.”²¹⁶

Bonner describes the Tuacc tradition in a similar way, claiming that “from the beginning” the Tuacc “committed itself to open unions, nationally organised according to industrial sectors,

²¹⁴ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 4

²¹⁵ Ulrich, “The Origins”; Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

²¹⁶ Ulrich, “Only the workers”, p. viii

and based on strong factory floor organisation and a strong coordinating body which comprised at each level of a majority of worker representative [sic], which decided policy for the affiliates and controlled the resources they jointly pooled”.²¹⁷ For Bonner, writing at the time, this has a direct “bearing on the shape that Fosatu has ultimately assumed”.²¹⁸

Importantly, although this tradition originated in Durban, there was a significant level of agreement between certain Johannesburg based-academics involved in the IAS and those in Tuacc, who shared ideas about union policy and direction,²¹⁹ given that “from its inception”, the IAS “worked closely with the Durban-based Tuacc”.²²⁰ While there was a deep split within the activist group in the IAS, most of those that identified with the Tuacc position were eventually absorbed into Fosatu.

While acknowledging the important contributions made by white academics involved with these organisations, whose involvement in the union movement and commitment to democratic organisation was intimately tied to the emergence of the New Left, Ulrich gives significant weight to the role of workers in shaping this tradition, a process that “was not only dynamic and contested at times”,²²¹ but also shaped by the context in which it developed.²²² Here Ulrich concurs with the work of Buhlungu, who outlines the way that the lived experience of black workers (including participation in a variety of organisations, traditional customs, and negative experiences of apartheid) contributed to a common sense approach to democracy, which was developed and articulated with the assistance of white academics.²²³

Nevertheless, since “Fosatu’s political position... cannot be understood in isolation and forms part of the federation’s unique approach to trade union organisation”,²²⁴ any definition of workerism must include the advocacy of this unique tradition.

3.5.2. The Cape Motor Unions: “a sense of pragmatism and power”

²¹⁷ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”, p. 7.

²¹⁸ *ibid*

²¹⁹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²²⁰ Bonner, *op cit.*, p. 7

²²¹ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 3

²²² *ibid*

²²³ Buhlungu, S. 2001. “Democracy and Modernisation in the Making of the South African Trade Union Movement”, PhD Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand

²²⁴ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 1

Another group was absolutely fundamental in shaping the workerist tradition. The incorporation of Coloured activists based in the Eastern and Western Cape motor industry through the unity talks at the end of the 1970s, likewise played an important role in defining the praxis of Fosatu, and thus workerism. Although “less clear on Marxism” and with less “reading background”²²⁵ than the activists coming out of the GFWBF and Tuacc leadership and the IAS, many but not all of whom were white academics, the Cape-based activists were more experienced in industrial trade union organising.²²⁶ Importantly, they brought with them vital experience and organisational forms and practices including “a sense of pragmatism and *power*”²²⁷ that the academics did not possess to the same extent, but which dovetailed with the approach of the academics in important respects.

Given that they were less well-read than academics whose university background had exposed them to ideas percolating in the New Left, these activists were far less influenced by the ideological revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. However, their organisational approach and views on democracy and non-racialism²²⁸ – despite their roots elsewhere – were remarkably congruent with those adopted by the international New Left, and by the workerist leadership of Tuacc and the IAS. According to Sauls “when we [Eastern Cape activists] came into the Fosatu group, meeting other people, people already had these concepts of the society that they were looking for”.²²⁹ Because these ideas dovetailed neatly with many of the ideas held by the Eastern Cape activists, Fosatu’s leadership became “increasingly unified”²³⁰ as time passed. Therefore, although certain theoretical aspects of workerism may have “out of... essentially white intellectuals”, whose class theory and commitment to participatory democracy derived from their connection to and location within the New Left, this “doesn’t mean that it necessarily stayed with the white intellectuals”, or that these ideas were uniquely the property of these intellectuals.²³¹

²²⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg. While this is true, Fred Sauls recalled having read banned texts in the years preceding his involvement with Fosatu, claiming that “long before I even came into the trade union movement, people read about these things. There were groups like the Unity Movement that had discussion groups with students and people like that. In sport, in SACOS [South African Council of Sports], they would discuss these issues, all of the issues about socialism, struggle and stuff like that” (Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth).

²²⁶ The unions in the Western Cape, a Unity Movement stronghold, did not initially come into Fosatu, due to the perception of the Fosatu leadership as being too apolitical. (Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg)

²²⁷ Bonner, P. 1983. “The Independent Unions”, p. 23

²²⁸ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

²²⁹ *ibid*

²³⁰ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²³¹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

Indeed, if the contributions from Tuacc and the IAS were crucial, it must be acknowledged that the workerist praxis was developed by the combined effort of academics, worker leaders and workers themselves located nationally. Importantly therefore, just as New Left spread throughout Fosatu's leadership (and base) by a process of "distillation"²³² so the insight gained by "organic" intellectuals through years of experience in the trade union movement were learnt by those with academic backgrounds. The motor unions played a key role, but a similar shaping of the Tuacc/ Fosatu tradition from below would be evident again and again, as the movement drew in large numbers of worker militants. In the early period, for example, Fosatu's decision to register under the provisions enshrined in the Wiehahn Commission, for example, and to subsequently enter Industrial Councils, was heavily influenced by the experience of the (Coloured and African) motor unions in the Cape, who were able to maintain worker control and their autonomy even whilst participating in these structures.

These currents thus came together to produce an evolving workerist current in Fosatu's leadership. Thus for Moses Mayekiso, while "There were people who would have been driven by theory, there were people who were driven by practical experiences", it was "merging these therefore produced this workerist [tradition]."²³³

3.5.3. Distinguishing workerists from non-workerists

We have now identified a number of characteristics – namely a commitment to non-racialism, industrial unionism, radical democracy, "tight" federation and political autonomy, combined with a sense of pragmatism – that seem central to the Fosatu tradition, and so, to workerism. However, this set of characteristics – taken together as components of a common whole – is also useful in that it differentiates Fosatu from other union bodies at the time. For example, the policy of non-racialism – meaning here common organisation in integrated trade unions, across racial lines – allows us to distinguish workerism from those unions that subscribed to the approach adopted by *both* Tucsa, which for most of its existence operated segregated "parallel" unions, and usually excluded Africans altogether, *and* the UTP/ Cusa

²³² Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010 Johannesburg. Adler claimed that Fosatu's education programme "certainly had its role", given that "guys like Dlamini, Gomomo, Dube... got an exposure that they wouldn't otherwise have got, Mayekiso [too]". According to Phillip Bonner, when Moses Mayekiso had his leg broken, he took him several influential books in the New Left "and it took him about two months to get through all these texts." (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th January 2010, Johannesburg)

²³³ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

tradition,²³⁴ which refused to allow whites into its leadership. However, it does not differentiate the workerist tradition from that of – for example – Sactu in the 1950s, since the old Sactu was non-racial as well.

However, this differentiation can be done through an analysis of Fosatu's political independence plus its unique organisational approach of "worker control". Sactu was always closely allied to the ANC, while operating mainly as an exile body allied to the ANC and SACP after its collapse in the 1960s. This means that its role inside South Africa was largely confined to serving as a conduit for guerrilla recruitment. In this sense, it was regarded by the workerists as being less accountable to its members than it was to the imperatives of the ANC and SACP leadership.²³⁵ Secondly, while Sactu was organised industrially, it did not have the same rigorous system of democracy as Fosatu. It was not organised in such a way as to ensure a worker majority in decision-making bodies at all levels of the organisation, and there were "a number of union executive officials" who occupied "positions usually reserved to worker representatives".²³⁶

All Fosatu leaders I interviewed in this study generally acknowledged that these organisational principles, strategies and union policies were distinctive and central to Fosatu.²³⁷ However, although this set of characteristics is sufficiently unique as to establish what is distinctive about the Fosatu tradition as a whole; it is *necessary but not sufficient* to denote a workerist tendency *within* Fosatu's leadership, firstly, because it leaves out important political and innovative views held by workerist respondents, and secondly, because it does not reflect the heated debates over political issues *within* the leadership of the federation.

3.5.4. The New Left, "A Radical Critique of Capitalism", the Union versus the Vanguard

²³⁴ Although beyond the scope of this report, several people in Cusa were likewise referred to as workerists.

²³⁵ See Lambert, *Political Unionism in South Africa*, chapters 1-2

²³⁶ Golding, 1986 "BC Trade Unions" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol10, No. 2, p. 33-34

²³⁷ See Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg; Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town; Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2010, Port Elizabeth; Interview with Chris Dlamini, 9 June 2009, Johannesburg; Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010; Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth; Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town, Teleconference Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg.

A third, and absolutely key, aspect of workerism was its “radical critique of capitalism”.²³⁸ Sactu was influenced by Marxism, but it was the Marxism of the SACP. On the one hand, this contained a classical Marxist-Leninist approach to movement building centred on vanguardism, and on the other hand, it adopted a two-stage strategy of change for South Africa, which effectively meant fostering a cross-class nationalist movement for capitalist democracy under ANC hegemony.

South Africa has a strong Marxist-Leninist tradition, dating back to the 1920s, identified with the SACP and Trotskyism. In its main manifestation (the SACP), this Marxism was bound to Sactu and still is bound to the ANC. Many trade union leaders, particularly those coming out of the Sactu tradition, subscribed to Marxism, and based their political strategy on the Marxism-Leninism developed in the Soviet Union. The SACP therefore, with financial support from the Soviet bloc, “gave uncritical support to every twist and turn of Soviet policy”.²³⁹

The dominant Fosatu position was anti-capitalist, but it was not Soviet Marxist. Ginsberg suggests that another key feature of workerism was the influence of Western Marxism, and understanding of capitalism and apartheid as intertwined.²⁴⁰ Nash takes this argument further: the revival of the workplace struggle in South Africa, after years of industrial quiescence, centred on the articulation of three strategic innovations – a flexible approach to leadership, a view of non-racialism that went beyond liberal “tokenism” and a conception of grassroots organisation which was stressed accountability and was linked to a larger struggle, and a radical critique of capitalism rooted in Western Marxism. Importantly, these “strategic innovations” were for Nash not specifically Marxist in inspiration, being pioneered by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and expressed in the larger New Left that exploded worldwide.²⁴¹

According to Sheehan, in South Africa “many activists, particularly blacks, were introduced to Marxism and the debates surrounding it primarily through [grassroots] struggles rather than the universities, as previous waves had in the many forms of political education of the liberation movement, including Robben Island, MK camps and the Lenin School in

²³⁸ Nash, “The Moment of”, p. 73

²³⁹ *ibid*

²⁴⁰ Ginsburg, “Trade Union Education”

²⁴¹ Nash, *op. cit.*

Moscow”.²⁴² Many of *these* Marxists overtly opposed Fosatu’s workerist leadership. For example, Andrew Zulu, a notable critic of workerism – a “populist” who objected to what he called “whites controlling... Fosatu”²⁴³ – identified as a Marxist, “involved in what they called communism”.²⁴⁴

But workerist leftism, according to Webster, originated in a group of “essentially white intellectuals” and their “Marxist class theory”, premised on an “understanding of class as a contradiction between capital and labour as the central concern”.²⁴⁵ By contrast, SACP Marxism, with the two-stage theory, essentially posited the racial/national contradiction as primary: the first stage is, essentially, a struggle between the widest possible alliance of blacks (plus sympathetic whites), across class lines, against white domination, but without a specifically anti-capitalist outcome. It is not surprising then that workerism was condemned by the SACP,²⁴⁶ *or* that Fosatu refused to accept the SACP’s vanguard claims.

The particular brand of Marxism that influenced the Tuacc and Fosatu union leadership in the 1970s and 1980s was something quite different to the SACP brand. It was largely free of the trappings of party-building, it was shaped by Western Marxism and radical social history, *and* it operated as part of an eclectic New Left that had many libertarian, even anarchist and syndicalist, influences. So, the Tuacc/Fosatu leadership was undoubtedly influenced by Marxism, but this was not orthodox Soviet Marxism; nor was Marxism, of whatever type, the only radical left influence on workerism (discussed more in Ch. 5-8, See Ch. 5, section 5.1 for a critique of the conflation of workerism with Marxism.).²⁴⁷

These different Marxisms were debated, even among Fosatu leaders. According to Erwin, “you’d have a combination of essentially intellectuals – mainly white, with old experienced activists who had been on the island, or arrested or something like that, who had also been

²⁴² Sheehan, H. 2009. “Contradictory Transformations: observations on the intellectual dynamics of South African Universities” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, vol. 7, No.1

²⁴³ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.2. Minutes of the Central Committee Meeting, 26th – 27th July 1980.

²⁴⁴ HP: AH 199 C1.7.3.16.1.11. Interview with Andrew Zulu

²⁴⁵ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20 November 2010, Johannesburg:

²⁴⁶ See for example, Nyawuza. 1985. “The New “Marxist” Tendencies and the Battle of Ideas in the South” in *African Communist*, No. 103; Comrades in Africa. 1985. “The Intelligentsia Must Be Won Over to Our Side” in *African Communist*, No. 101 (second quarter); Nhere. 1984. “The Dangers of ‘Legal Marxism’ in South Africa” in *African Communist*, No. 99; Toussaint. 1983. “A Trade Union is Not a Political Party: critique of the Speech “Where Fosatu Stands”” in *African Communist*, No. 93.

²⁴⁷ The conditions that gave rise to this New Leftism will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

exposed to theoretical political discourse”.²⁴⁸ Similarly, although Motala came from a (Trotskyite) Unity Movement milieu, he was subsequently exposed to the same new ideas as many of his (white) counterparts in the Tuacc and the universities, after studying at Warwick University and being associated with other revisionists based there, including Martin Legassick. Unlike Legassick, Motala was never a member of the Militant Tendency of the ANC.²⁴⁹

In short, although workerism was influenced by the broad Marxist body of thought, it requires differentiation from the dominant form of Marxism that has long existed in the South African context. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the left politics of workerism were solely the product of Marxism, since it also showed indirect and direct influences from other currents. This will be explored in the Chapter 5-8 dealing with workerist theory and strategy. However, we can indicate some of these differences clearly when we note that Fosatu workerism tended to a genuinely syndicalist view of the union as a crucial, if not *the* crucial, agent of social change – something that is anathema to orthodox Marxism (this element is discussed in depth in chapters 7 and 8).

3.6. Conclusion

Any attempt at redefinition has to first and foremost tackle the problem of whether workerism, or a tendency of any name for that matter, even exists in the first place. In this chapter it has been argued that Ulrich has provided the basis for this by developing a definition of what she refers to as the “worker control tradition”:²⁵⁰ a tradition that is *distinct* to Fosatu, albeit developed by its predecessors in the 1970s, Tuacc and the GFWBF.²⁵¹ However, because Fosatu’s leadership agreed (in varying degrees) with the broad principles that characterise this tradition, the tradition cannot be equated with workerism, because there were divisions in Fosatu’s leadership that expressed themselves in strategic and tactical debates. Furthermore, the set of characteristics embodied in this tradition are silent on the important contribution made by experienced “organic intellectuals” of the Eastern Cape Motor Unions, as well as various other important political aspirations and ideas held by the group.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

²⁴⁹ Telephone Interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

²⁵⁰ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

²⁵¹ *ibid*

The workerist leadership can therefore be distinguished from those who cannot be said to be workerist. The key ingredient here, as has been discussed, is that this tradition cannot be understood unless its particular brand of leftism – deeply influenced by the international New Left movement – is highlighted. Importantly, this leftism, although influenced by Marxism, *cannot* be considered purely Marxist; it was also influenced by traditions like anarchism, including syndicalism, which is a revolutionary union model that derives directly from anarchism. Marxism has a long history in South Africa, and what was so distinctive about the tradition was that it was formulated in a particular historical context (described in Chapter 4) through which a new and innovative socialist politics, *and* one quite different from the (dominant) Marxism of the SACP, was made possible. This amalgamation between the “worker-control tradition” pioneered in Durban and a left analytic framework of a particular variety was supplemented by the experience and pragmatism, which nevertheless dovetailed neatly with the ideas circulating in the socialist milieu, to produce a distinctive and recognisable workerist tradition.

Chapter 4

4. Workerism, the New Left and Libertarian Socialism



Figure 4. Police attack Frame Workers, 22nd May 1980, expressing the intense climate of the period. Natal Mercury. *The South African Institute of Race Relations*. AD 1788/ 11B2

4.1. Introduction

This chapter locates workerism in its historical context. Because workerism was far more a product of its time than is often recognised, the full extent of the current cannot adequately grasped unless against a brief discussion of the particular conjuncture in which it emerged.

Workerism emerged in a period in left and labour history marked by widespread upsurge of mass working class militancy—culminating in the so-called Paris and Prague “Springs”—and in which, also, the long-frozen certainties of the Left started to break up, exemplified by the emergence of the “New Left”. The New Left included Marxist-Leninist currents, but these generally were highly critical of the Soviet Union and did not take their orders from Moscow

– while engaging with a range of influences and themes absent from this tradition, like self-management, autonomy and self-activity.

Although these ideas and the praxis they engendered were late to arrive in South Africa as a result of the environment of censorship and political isolation, they nonetheless eventually made their way into the student and trade union milieu, imprinting themselves onto the politics of workerism. This was made possible primarily through the return of émigrés and exiles who took up positions at South African open universities. However, their delayed and fragmented assimilation resulted in a haphazard fusion of Old and New Left, and there was therefore “a lot of quite woolly thinking”¹ by the academic leadership in Fosatu. Importantly, this is not necessarily an aberration from the New Left internationally, but rather a more *typical* feature of its eclecticism.²

4.2. Context

4.2.1. International Context: “deStalinisation” and libertarian socialism

One of the most significant events of the 20th Century was the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin three years later at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, while essentially self-serving, paved the way for fundamental changes in the world Communist movement, which until then had slavishly followed the Soviet model. As criticism built up, small cracks began to appear in the seemingly monolithic international Communist movement.³ Anonymous criticisms of the real nature of the Soviet Union began appearing in left-wing journals, as a breath of fresh air was breathed into the mainstream left.

The process of “deStalinisation” that followed intersected with structural problems, so that by the mid 1950s wages in Eastern Europe had sunk to well below those of the pre-war years, despite extremely high levels of growth.⁴ Rising living costs and decreases in police repression were important factors in creating the conditions for working class revolts in these regions – exacerbated by an underlying cynicism towards the official “communism” foisted onto the popular classes of Eastern Europe by Soviet imperialism. This laid the basis for the

¹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 5th November 2010, Johannesburg

² *ibid*

³ Birchall, I. 1974. *Workers Against the Monolith: The Communist Parties since 1943*. Pluto Press: London

⁴ *ibid*

development of several groups within the Eastern Bloc who had begun to explore and expound more democratic, libertarian, and anti-imperialist forms of socialism. The most important of these was the *Petőfi* Circle, formed by a group of socialist students in Hungary, and described as the “main milieu for the generation of critical ideas”.⁵

The first explosion of mass working class militancy in the East in the post-Stalin era occurred in Czechoslovakia and East Berlin in 1953, followed by Poland and Hungary in 1956. In Poland, workers of the Zispo locomotive industry in Poznan went on strike, which soon escalated into an insurrection; the police station was seized and the beginnings of a workers’ council movement began to emerge.⁶ Hungary experienced a revolutionary upsurge.

However, by October 1956, one after the other, the Eastern European uprisings were crushed, with the Hungarian revolution put down by Soviet tanks. This signalled clearly that, despite its verbal denunciations of “Stalinism”, the Khrushchev regime was cast in the same mould.

In parallel events in the “First World”, the British invaded Suez in 1956. The impacts of these events provoked a massive wave of anti-imperialist moral outrage, in both the capitalist “West” and communist “East”. However, it was not only the “First” and “Second” worlds that were experiencing upheavals. Friction between Russia and China became more pronounced, culminating in the Sino-Soviet split in 1963,⁷⁸ the clashing of Chinese and Russian forces over the island of Chenpao, and the withdrawal of Russian aid to China. Cuba was also engaged in anti-imperialist conflict with the United States resulting in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Again, these splits – including the Chinese denunciations of the Soviet regime (as “revisionist”, “state capitalist” and so forth) – also undermined the former unity of the Communist movement.

It was against this background that the “New Left” was inaugurated. The emergence of the term in Britain, and of what can be called the “first New Left”, can be found in a group of Marxist historians including E.P. Thompson and Ralph Milliband, linked to the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the wake of Khrushchev’s speech, Thompson and Milliband played

⁵ Birchall, *Workers Against the Monolith* p. 88

⁶ Birchall, *op. cit.*

⁷ Birchall, *op. cit.*, p. 142

⁸ The main causes of the split were firstly the Cuban missile crisis, in which the Chinese leadership accused Russia of adventurism and capitulation; and the Indo-Chinese war, in which the Russians had supplied arms to India, thereby remaining “embarrassingly neutral” (Birchall, *op. cit.*, p. 143)

a key role as dissidents in the *Communist Party Historians Group* within the Communist Party and its mouthpiece, *Reasoner*. The *Reasoner* later merged with the *Universities and Left Review* to form the well-known *New Left Review* in 1960.⁹

Four years before, Thompson and others left the party in CPGB in disgust, not least occasioned by the crushing of the Hungarian revolution by the Soviet Union. The “first New Left” was largely a European as opposed to a global current, and closely associated with the events of “deStalinisation”. It became linked with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in Britain, which refused to take sides in the Cold War, criticising the militarism of both West and East. The CND was itself quite eclectic, with self-identified anarchists a very large presence.¹⁰

Thompson was also an influential member of the History Workshop of Britain. If he identified as a Marxist, his was a libertarian Marxism. Thompson was deeply influenced by the libertarian socialist, William Morris, for whom he wrote a biography, revising it later to stress the libertarian aspects, even if he downplayed the impact of anarchism on Morris. Morris, a “sort of Dickensian anarchist”,¹¹ was instrumental in the formation of the Socialist League in Britain in 1884, which by 1887, was dominated by anarchists.¹² In Thompson’s writing – like in Morris’ – a “commitment to the idea of ‘libertarian communism’ is a constant” theme.¹³ Thus, Thompson referred to himself as “a historian in a libertarian Marxist tradition”, and an advocate of “libertarian socialism”.¹⁴

The “second New Left” arguably emerged in the United States, epitomised by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a left student activist body, and the Students Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which emerged in the black Civil Rights Movement. Like the “first New Left”, it was infused with anti-imperialist sentiment, with the Vietnam War paying the part of Suez and Hungary a decade earlier. Both had strong libertarian currents,

⁹ Renton, D. 2004. *Dissident Marxism*. Zed Books: London and New York

¹⁰ Marshall, P. 2008. *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. PM Press: California, p. 492

¹¹ G.K Chesterton cited in Marshall, *op cit.*, p. 171

¹² Beer, M. 2002. *A History of British Socialism*. Routledge: London. In 1887, the 3rd Annual Conference of the League voted in favor of a (anarchist inspired) resolution that proclaimed, “This conference endorses the policy of abstention from parliamentary action, hitherto pursued by the League, and sees no sufficient reason for altering it”. (See Notes to Marx, K. and F. Engels. 2001. *Marx-Engels Collected Works*. Volume 48. . International Publishers: New York, p. 538).

¹³ McNally, D. 1993. “E P Thompson: class struggle and historical materialism” in *International Socialism*, No.

61

¹⁴ *ibid*

which stressed self-management, autonomy and self-activity, and drew on a range of influences. The early SDS, for example, had elements of “legal reformism”, associated with white liberals and Maoists, as well as a current of self-described “Student Syndicalism”, linked to SDS National Secretary, Gregory Calvert.¹⁵ Later the SDS claimed “fidelity to a version of Marxism-Leninism”¹⁶ which involved the “conscious rejection of liberalism”.¹⁷

The New Left thus combined diverse and contradictory elements and influences: the Black Panthers for example invoked the insights of Franz Fanon, and even praised the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, but also had a Marxist-Leninist organisational practice and a “Third Worldist” affinity to African nationalist leaders. This is emblematic of the paradoxical eclecticism embraced by the movement.

In the US, the popularisation of the term “New Left” can be traced back to C. Wright Mills’ “Letter to the New Left”, published in 1960, in which he advocates a shift away from the approach of the “Old Left” towards a more philosophical Marxism dealing with early Marxist themes such as alienation. It was also used by Howard Zinn (libertarian socialist and advisor to student organisation, SNCC) in a forum organised by the SDS in 1967, where he spoke on “Marxism and the New Left”.¹⁸

Although the second New Left had a deep American connection, it is better described as “an international political tendency”,¹⁹ finding resonance in places as far as New York and Johannesburg.²⁰ The second New Left (which was numerically and influentially more significant than the first New Left) was marked by a great heterogeneity, both within and across countries and regions. The New Left was thus plagued by fundamental contradictions. It was located at the convergence between a assortment of political and ideological currents, organisations and struggles.²¹ It was a simultaneously a critique, a praxis and a theory, and as

¹⁵ See Carr, B. “Afterword” in Carr, J. 1975. *Bad: The autobiography of James Carr*. Herman Grof: New York. Also see, Buhle, P. 2011. “Syndicalism in the United States” in *Socialist History*. No. 37, p. 20; Mattick Jr, P. 1975. “Old Left, New Left, What’s Left?” in Brechen et al (eds.). *Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers’ Movements*. Fawcett Publications: United States, p. 529

¹⁶ Buhle, “Challenging the Cultural”, p. 20

¹⁷ Mattick Jr, “Old Left, New Left”, p. 531

¹⁸ Lynd, S. 1969. “The New Left” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 382, p. 66; See also Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*

¹⁹ Lynd, *op cit.*, p. 65

²⁰ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History and”; Nash “The Moment of”

²¹ Gombin, R. 1975. *The Origins of Modern Leftism*. Penguin: Hammondsworth; Renton, *Dissident Marxism*, p. 116

such, the form it assumed depended on how these various elements were combined, which were given priority, and the nature of the content of each. Furthermore, all of these factors were shaped by the peculiarities of the history and context of the region in which it was produced. It was the British New Left and to a lesser extent, the French, and their theoretical developments, that exerted the most substantial influence over the form of the South African movement, but again, local particularities were at least equally important.

In the United States, a long period of sustained growth and welfare capitalism had produced a situation very different to that predicted by Marx: capitalism seemed stable, large sectors of the proletariat earned decent wages, and could afford homes and cars. Even social democrats were proclaiming “the end of ideology”, believing that any problem could be solved by means of the correct technical adjustments.²² However, by the end of the 1960s, the post-war boom was winding down, and advanced capitalist countries of the “West” began to experience a profits squeeze reflecting a crisis of over-accumulation.²³ This led the governments of Western Europe and America to introduce austerity measures designed primarily at reducing real wages, which coincided with rising inflation and unemployment,²⁴ sparking massive workplace struggles, notably in Britain, France and Italy.

Meanwhile, where universities were previously the playground and place of reproduction of the elite, the boom and the welfare state meant that by the 1960s, Western universities were churning out thousands of graduates destined for jobs in middle administration.²⁵ The new mass constituency of students began to challenge what they saw as appalling conditions for meaningful learning, including the authoritarian and antiquated nature of the administration of university life. This intersected with other conflicts. For example, the United States was embroiled in a very unpopular war in Vietnam. The racism of American society was becoming increasingly and bitterly resented by a large section of its population, as the Civil Rights Movement showed. At the same time, a new subculture emerged among students, with

²² Isserman, M. 1987. *If I had a Hammer... The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*. Basic Books Inc. Publishers: New York; Renton, *Dissident Marxism*; Ehrenreich, B. and J. Ehrenreich. *Long March, Short Spring*. Monthly Review Press: New York

²³ Walton, J. and D. Seddon. 1994. *Free Markets and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford and Cambridge

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, *op cit.*; Birchall, *op. cit.*

the hippie movement as its culmination.²⁶ If rebellious students in the 1930s tended to be right-wing in the West, by the 1960s they tended to be on the left.

The centrally planned Eastern European countries were also deeply affected by the worldwide economic downturn – due in part to their increasing integration into the world economy, and the internationalisation and synchronisation of capitalism.²⁷ By the late 1960s trade between the capitalist “West” and the “communist” “East” had increased significantly, with imports from the West increasing from 12.2 percent in the 1965-70 period to 31.2 percent between 1970 and 1975.²⁸ This significantly increased the balance of payments deficit, and led to slower growth and growing austerity. Eastern European states attempted to stave off a crisis by borrowing, which exacerbated the situation – producing significant social unrest.

Students and workers in the East were thus beginning to become infected with the same revolutionary spirit that was sweeping the West. In Czechoslovakia, the introduction of market reforms with the accompanying rhetoric of freedom and democracy, under Dubcek of the reformist wing of the ruling Czechoslovakian Communist Party (KSC), prompted social upheaval and strike wave in 1968. The reforms also created tensions with the Russian leadership who suspected Dubcek from straying too far from the Soviet model. On August 20th 1968 “Russian troops and planes, assisted by those of four satellites, invaded Czechoslovakia, and proceeded slowly and surely, to restore order and a pro-Russian leadership”,²⁹ an event that has subsequently come to be known as the crushing of the Prague Spring.

Like the events of 1953-1956, this had huge political fallout. According to Van Der Linden, “the period after 1968 witnessed the broadest, and most varied and intense debate about the nature of the Soviet Union since the October Revolution of 1917”,³⁰ and prompted another wave of resignations and splits in the Communist movement. This played out differently in different contexts. The SACP, which supported the Soviet invasion of 1968 just as it had supported the Soviet invasion of 1956, was largely unaffected. (The SACP has never suffered

²⁶ Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, *Long March*

²⁷ Walton and Seddon, *Free Markets*, p. 7

²⁸ Walton and Seddon, *op. cit.*, p. 8

²⁹ Birchall, *Workers Against the Monolith*, p. 153

³⁰ Van Der Linden. M. 2007. *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917*. Brill: United States, p. 254

a major split.) The parallels, meanwhile, between the invasion of Suez and of Hungary, and of Vietnam and Czechoslovakia, again suggested that naked imperialism was characteristic of both Cold War blocs, and so the USSR in Czechoslovakia attracted bitter criticism. Many new radicals, therefore, refused to take sides in the Cold War, and started to explore alternative traditions of left-wing dissent.

The pinnacle of the New Left in Western Europe was the Paris uprising of May 1968, which saw students and workers in joint demonstrations. Ten million workers, two thirds of the entire French workforce, participated in the greatest general strike in the country's history. Occupations of "studios, labs, train stations, work places of every kind"³¹ occurred all over France. Again, eclecticism was common: at the occupied Sorbonne University, posters of Lenin and Mao were displayed alongside anarchist black and red-and-black flags. The French Communist Party (PCF) retained enough credibility to reign in the movement, but a large, dissident and energised dissident New Left had undeniably emerged.

In short, the period was marked by a fundamental loss of credibility for both Social Democracy, partly a result of the decline of the Keynesian Welfare State, and official and Communism, the two dominant forces on the anti-capitalist movement since the defeats of the anarchists and syndicalists in the period of the 1930s-1950s. Radicalised students, workers and oppressed nationalities began looking for a new, more appropriate, socialist politics. This global inspirational vacuum came to be filled by an eclectic mix of ideologies and theories, which ranged from non-Marxist forms of socialism and more radical critiques of Marxism-Leninism, to less radical critiques directed more to the Soviet Union than to Marxist-Leninism itself.

The most radical critiques incorporated into the New Left were from four main libertarian traditions. First, as noted above, there was the libertarian socialist tradition associated with figures like Thompson, who provided something of an intellectual bridge between the "first" and "second" New Lefts, exemplified by his immersion in CND, and who sought to elaborate a libertarian Marxism that drew on earlier figures like Morris.

Second, there were the non-Marxist currents such as the anarchism of Kropotkin and

³¹ Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, *Long March*, p. 84

Bakunin,³² the “utopian socialism” of Fourier and proto-anarchism³³ of Proudhon.

The third and fourth came from dissidents within the Marxist canon. The third comprised those attempting to revise classical Marxism including the Austro-Hungarian Marxism of Lukacs and the early work of Antonio Gramsci (both of which overlapped to an extent with the anarchists/syndicalists as both were “very involved with the council movements in Hungary and Italy while grappling theoretically with Sorelian and syndicalist themes”).³⁴ Similarly, this group includes those whose revisions were more dramatic, even transcending classical Marxism altogether, embodied by for example Karl Korsch,³⁵ Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Rosa Luxemburg was another important influence in this group, with her rejection of Leninist vanguardism, stress on workers councils and political pluralism, and on what Fosatu would later call “worker control” of workers movements.³⁶ (Although, for all that, she remained a loyal member of the Communist Party and never drew “the logical conclusions”).³⁷)

Many of these authors had significant links to the fourth group, the libertarian Marxism of council communism, which emerged in the 1920s and was associated with figures like Anton Pannekoek, Herman Gorter and Otto Ruhle. Although they elaborated many of their views on the basis of a radical reading of Marxism, they were also deeply influenced by syndicalism, arguing by 1917 that “the old forms of party and trades union organisation were unsuitable for the revolutionary upheavals”.³⁸ The “model they envisioned was inspired in part by the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)”, a key syndicalist union.³⁹ They formed bodies like International Communists of Germany (IKD), modelled on the IWW; later participated in the anarcho-syndicalist Free Workers’ Union of Germany (FAUD) and the

³² In fact, Herbert Marcuse, the “father of the New Left”, was often referred to an “Anarcho-Marxist” (See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 541)

³³ This term is owed to van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

³⁴ Tucker, K. H. *French Revolutionary Syndicalism in the Public Sphere*. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom, p. 212

³⁵ Korsch had a relationship to both Lukacs and Gramsci - in the sense that all three were educated in the anti-war movement in the period after the First World War, and was influenced by both syndicalism and council communism. See Renton, *Dissident Marxism*, p. 63; Mattick, P. 1978. “Karl Korsch: His Contribution to Revolutionary Marxism” in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*. Merlin Press: London

³⁶ Thatcher, I.D. 2007. “Left Communism: Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky compared” in D. Glaser and D. Walker (eds.) *Twentieth Century Marxism: A Global Introduction*, Routledge: USA and Canada, p. 40.

³⁷ Gombin, *The Origins*, p. 95

³⁸ Gerber, J. 1988. “From Left Radicalism to Council Communism: Anton Pannekoek and German Revolutionary Marxism” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 23

³⁹ *ibid*

Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD), which described itself as “not a party in the traditional sense”, given that its task was to act solely as a catalyst of ideas. One wing, around the German Workers Union Unitary-Organisation (AAUD-E), rejected even the KAPD, and developed close links to the syndicalist International Workers Association (formed in 1922 in Berlin).

Alongside these theoretical influences, the New Left also looked to historical examples for inspiration. In addition to the more recent Hungarian and Czech examples, abortive revolutionary movements such as the Italian factory occupations of 1919-20 and the Spanish revolution of 1936-7, both deeply indebted to anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism, provided examples of a praxis and organisational form differing from that provided by Leninism and the USSR. (This is thus another example of the complicated and at times somewhat *indirect* anarchist and syndicalist influence running through several groups within the New Left, and, in part, why it is necessary to draw a sharper distinction between the New Left, and Marxism than Nash undertakes in his study.⁴⁰)

Significantly, the (second) New Left drew on a “radical tradition” that rejected the authoritarian “content of Marx’s ideas and, after 1917, their realization” and stressed anti-statism and workers’ self-management, through councils, and praised “the great autonomous mass movements” described above.⁴¹ Yet, as Gombin has claimed, it was “not always aware of its own antecedents”,⁴² and, because of this, somewhat theoretically impoverished – inasmuch as it often did not pay adequate attention to earlier texts or experiences, and thus, their insights and lessons.

The New Left, moreover, was not monolithic. Running alongside these libertarian currents was a strong Marxist-Leninist current. This tended to reject the Soviet Union – or at least its leadership – or the official Communist Parties, rather than rejecting Marxism-Leninism itself. It was not in the tradition of “Western Marxism”, but took inspiration from Maoism (which defended the Stalinist period) or Castroism (which allied to the Soviet Union but which advocated armed struggle, as opposed to the doctrine of peaceful coexistence between East and West favoured by Khrushchev) or Trotskyism (which viewed the Soviet Union as a

⁴⁰ Nash, “The Moment of”

⁴¹ Gombin, *The Radical Tradition*, p. 119

⁴² Gombin, *op cit.*, p.12

“degenerated” socialist society, and the Communist Parties as corrupted). Thus, if “dissident” in terms of their relationship to the Soviet Union, these sections of the New Left did not necessarily dissent from many of the core elements of old-style Communism; they could also display exceptionally authoritarian tendencies.

Thus, within the New Left there existed *simultaneously* the latest in a chain of profoundly libertarian revolutionaries, organisational forms and ideas – the remnants of important and significant libertarian movements outside the official Communist movement – as well as currents that were still within the mould of politics for decades exemplified by the Soviet Union. Importantly, while these distinct tendencies can be discerned in the New Left, in practice their edges blurred significantly, and New Leftists could often be found to sit uncomfortably (or, even more significantly, comfortably) between the various doctrines. The students and activists involved were often unabashedly willing to experiment with new organisation forms, new methods and forms of protest. What bound this all together was a stress on the importance of spontaneity and “decentralised direct action”⁴³, which at times led to a conscious avoidance of questions of long-term strategising and planning:

The single most characteristic element of the New Left is the existential commitment to action, in the knowledge that the consequence of action can never be fully predicted; this commitment has survived all changes in political fashion.⁴⁴

4.2.2. The South African Context

The rise of the New Left elsewhere has become the stuff of legend, with a wealth of academic work still finding its way into university libraries today. By contrast, with a few notable exceptions, the influence of the New Left in South Africa has been largely ignored.⁴⁵ However, its absence in academic work does not mean that South Africa was immune to penetration from ideas percolating abroad. Although the spread of New Left ideas was substantially thinner and later in South Africa than elsewhere – in part due to the formal proscription of “communist” literature in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, which led to a partial suppression of Marxist, anarchist and other materials – it is not hard to see, in hindsight, that New Left ideas had a significant impact on the trajectory of the anti-apartheid struggle.

⁴³ Lynd, “The New Left”, p. 65

⁴⁴ Lynd, *op. cit.*, p. 64

⁴⁵ There are notable examples, which have been discussed in Chapter 2.

Despite the repressive measures introduced to curb their spread on English-speaking campuses, New Left ideas did filter into South African universities, finding an important audience among radical students and academics in various institutions, primarily the University of Natal, Wits and the UCT towards the end of the 1960s. The major impact of the New Left on both black and white students in South Africa was thus in the 1970s, rather than the 1960s as was the case elsewhere. In fact, the 1960s in South Africa was “notable for the almost total absence of any significant knowledge of and access to core writings of the New Left amongst Anglophone students”.⁴⁶ No sooner had the New Left in the “West” and “East” almost disintegrated only a few years after its climax in 1968, when it became an important influence in South Africa. This “time-warp”⁴⁷ can be attributed chiefly to the particular and specific context South African students and workers found themselves facing in the 1960s.

Although it is true that the expressions of the New Left that emerged in the various parts of the world shared important features and characteristics, these movements were by no means homogenous. Context was always a significant stimulus to heterogeneity. Students and activists in South Africa were operating under a completely different set of circumstances to those in the United States, for example. There, the political environment was relatively open after the demise of McCarthyism, and left literature was easily available and openly discussed and debated. The 1960s in South Africa, by contrast, are remembered as years of intense political repression and “high apartheid”. Black South Africans were forced to confront the apartheid state head-on in their daily lives. The Sharpeville and Langa shootings of 1960, the banning of the ANC and PAC, and forced removals were all prominent features of the period, as was the collapse of African unions. Fear of repression weighed heavily on the minds of all would-be activists. Although the apartheid state was primarily concerned with the suppression of the black majority, it did not tolerate white dissent that went beyond narrow bounds. Radicalised white students, at home and abroad, faced persecution, including bannings and jail time, if they dared speak out.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”, p. 7-8

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Saunders, *The Making of*. For example, Prime Minister John Vorster made constant references to Adrian Leftwich of the Armed Resistance Movement (ARM) – a white anti-apartheid organisation responsible for the 1964 Johannesburg Station bombing. With continual reference to Leftwich, Vorster described students as “children”. Meanwhile the apartheid state’s obsession with “communism” meant that even mildly subversive media strictly censored. (See Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”, p.60; also *The Witness*. 15th April 2010. “John Harris, hardly a martyr”, available at <[http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global\[_id\]=38916](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global[_id]=38916)>

By 1966 the general liberal atmosphere enjoyed by the white universities⁴⁹ was severely constrained by several pieces of apartheid legislation which prevented any non-white student from registering at an open university without permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs,⁵⁰ and which protected anyone practising racial segregation.⁵¹ As the 1960s progressed, in the context of the Sharpeville aftermath and increasing urbanisation, an atmosphere of obsessive and paranoid censorship prevented the spread of any ideas that could jeopardise the status quo. These fears were no doubt further reinforced by the existence of important and militant liberation movements elsewhere, including the rise of serious guerrilla struggles in neighbouring colonies, some of which were influenced by Marxism-Leninism.

In South Africa's heavily regulated political climate it is not surprising that left literature was hard to come by.⁵² Universities like Wits (which later stressed their anti-apartheid credentials), largely accommodated this situation by accepting a high degree of segregation and keeping banned works under lock-and-key. At the time, the Faculty were generally conservative or moderate, and local scholarship was quite isolated: "South Africa was a very isolated innocent place, nobody had any access to left literature of any substance"⁵³ until the late 1960s.

Yet the censors did not manage to identify all subversive material, however, with the result that a fair amount of popular New Left literature did find their ways to the shelves. Partly this was because it was the more traditional and well-known Communist literature that was banned. However, access to the new materials was shaped by apartheid as well. Most blacks, having been forced to endure years of "Bantu education", were never admitted into universities, and those that were entered racially and tribally segregated universities offering substandard education, rather than a lively climate of research and debate. Moreover, black lecturers at these segregated universities had a reputation of being "only be active inside the

⁴⁹ Some universities enjoyed far more political freedom than others. Wits for example permitted a more open academic programme, while the University of Natal was far more "politically circumscribed and controlled" (See Lunn, "Hippies, Radicals and ", p. 2). However, all three major campuses were far less regimented than broader society, often musicians and festivals with multi-racial audiences (*ibid*).

⁵⁰ The University Education Act of 1957 and the Extension of University Education Act in 1959

⁵¹ Two separate University Amendment Bills were introduced in 1966

⁵² For example, Jeremy Taylor's song "Ag pleez deddy wont you take us to the drive in", recorded in 1962 was banned for incorporating slang and mixing Afrikaans and English. Furthermore, the apartheid state prevented the introduction of television into South Africa until 1976.

In fact, broadcasters were threatened by authorities to take the popular TV series' *The Cosby Show* and *Roots* off the air, because they contained "black role models" (SAPA.1997. "Apartheid Officials tried to keep back figures off TV" online: <<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media/1997/9709/s970915a.htm>>)

⁵³ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

campus”,⁵⁴ with no interest in unions. The privilege of decent university education was largely reserved for whites, who also enjoyed the fruits of apartheid-era policies, including rapid upward mobility in the context of a sustained economic boom.⁵⁵ South Africa in the 1960s had one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and an industrial economy.⁵⁶

It was this privileged group of white students and emergent academics who had the most access to the ideas of the New Left passing through the Western universities. They were also most exposed to opportunities to study abroad, and the most willing receptors of the new ideas, despite the attempts by the state to prevent it. But unlike their American and European counterparts, South African radicals had little choice but to rely on direct contact with “overseas” in order to read subversive literature – often by studying abroad. They also relied heavily on oral communication with returned émigrés that could supply these ideas. Bozzoli and Delius make reference to a “photocopying culture”⁵⁷ that was crucial for the distribution of banned or hard-to-obtain material, ensuring that a “small corpus of banned texts were read and circulated surreptitiously”,⁵⁸ and facilitating the gradual spread of the New Left.

Heavy censorship meant that concepts and ideas that were familiar to students and workers in Europe and America in the 1970s were still largely alien to their South African counterparts. The English-speaking white universities remained dominated by liberal ideology, and the Afrikaans-speaking white universities were closely tied to the doctrines of Afrikaner nationalism. Marxist concepts being widely deployed as analytic and conceptual tools by the North American New Left were in many cases unheard of in South Africa.⁵⁹ Slowly, as the academic faculty changed, the new ideas became more mainstream, and an institutional infrastructure began to be built up. The most notable example can be perceived in the founding of Ravan Press in 1973, a radical publishing house based in Johannesburg – providing an outlet for local and international works on Southern Africa that were influenced by the new ideas.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Interview with Dniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁵⁵ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History and”

⁵⁶ Kemp, T. 1999. *Historical Patterns of Industrialization*, Longman: London

⁵⁷ The Xerox machine was made available in 1950 and proved a valuable resource for the distribution of banned literature (Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”).

⁵⁸ Bozzoli and Delius, *op. cit.*, p.18

⁵⁹ Bozzoli and Delius, *op. cit.*, p.18

⁶⁰ Bozzoli and Delius, *op. cit.*, p. 41

As a result of South Africa's isolation, New Left ideas also arrived in South Africa in a somewhat modified form, creating space "for adaptation and alternative interpretations".⁶¹ Part of the modification was shaped by the perseverance and persistence of the ideas of the Old Left in South Africa, which remained surprisingly monolithic under the rubric of the SACP. The events of 1953 to 1956 never created a crisis of conscience in the SACP, and dissidence remained largely confined to smaller Trotskyist groups. The SACP also retained high degree of credibility for radicals, given its undeniably impressive record of struggle since 1921 and its role in the 1960s and 1970s underground. This resulted in a haphazard fusion of Old and New Left amongst students and academics, and "a lot of quite woolly thinking"⁶² by Fosatu's leadership. Importantly however – as I have already indicated, and as will be discussed later – this is not necessarily an aberration from the New Left internationally, but rather a more *typical* feature of its eclecticism.⁶³

4.2.3. The Arrival of New Left Ideas in South Africa

Radicalised White South African students and academics, most of whom studied in Britain, were a key conduits through which the New Left entered South Africa.⁶⁴ A second key conduit, although one that would prove to have rather less of a direct impact on workerism, was the link between the BCM and black struggles in the United States.

Of the whites, the "revisionist" scholars played an extremely important role. This was a school of primarily South African-born historians, most of whom were completing doctoral degrees in the field of African Studies at British (and sometimes, American⁶⁵) universities during the 1960s. Revisionists abroad produced important works that circulated into South Africa. Revisionists that returned played a role in changing the universities, and threw themselves into projects like the local History Workshop.

The "revisionist" school was immensely significant, because of its critical influence on the white students and academics who would later be drawn into Tuacc, IIE, IAS and Fosatu. Although many revisionists are often retrospectively castigated for functionalism and

⁶¹ Lunn, "Hippies, Radicals and", p. 7

⁶² Interview with Phillip Bonner, 5th November 2010, Joannesburg

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ TULEC. Trade Union General Box. Labour History Workshop. "The Formative Years of the Independent Labour Movement: 1966 – 1979". 18-19th February 2002.

⁶⁵ Martin Legassick studied at the University of California, Los Angeles.

economism, and often with justification, their work was incredibly innovative for the time, shifting whole paradigms, profoundly challenging the liberal and Afrikaner nationalist models, and, through their influence on activists, helping alter the South African political landscape. The revisionists reformulated and largely rewrote African and South African historiography and from a fresh and exciting perspective, “recasting entire periods and explanations... in terms of the strident and confident neo-Marxism of the time”.⁶⁶ (See Ch.6, Section 6.2.1 for more on this group).

Links between South African and international student movements were also to prove important for the dissemination of ideas gaining currency on an international scale. Despite segregated campuses, it was not only white students that were engaged with what was happening abroad. The rise of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the United States were followed eagerly by black students in South African universities who, like their American counterparts, were searching for answers to their racial oppression and exclusion.⁶⁷

There were other catalysts that were important in the paradigm shift that began to take root in South Africa in the late 1960s. For one, the National Union of South African Students (Nusas), despite its liberal disposition, had links to more radical international students bodies overseas through its “International Department”,⁶⁸ and, despite its general liberal outlook, was curious to “know more about the workings of communism”.⁶⁹

Of the returning white students, many had been located in London, Sussex or Oxford, and many took up teaching positions at South African universities. This granted them the platform and the associated legitimacy from which to play their part in launching an indigenous New Left. These returnees were not only valuable as a conduit through which New Left ideas arrived, but were also able to assist in unpacking, explaining and translating them, thereby making them applicable to the South African context. They were also massively influential in the sense that they had had first-hand experience of the mood and atmosphere sweeping the globe elsewhere.

⁶⁶ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History and”, p. 19

⁶⁷ Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”

⁶⁸ Lunn, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ *Cape Argus* cited in Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”, p. 69

One of the most influential of these was Turner, who had returned from France in 1966. In France he had completed his doctorate on the existentialist Sartre, a sympathiser of the Soviet Union yet with complex links to the new radicalism. Although his return preceded the legendary events of May 1968 in Paris, Turner retained contact with academics and activists in France through which he was able to ascertain important information about what transpired. Turner placed emphasis on the capacity of people to change their world, which reflected his existentialist orientation. However, he was also well versed in various other New Left schools, complementing his existentialist approach with Hegelian and even French Structuralist discourses.⁷⁰ Turner's influence extended well beyond his insistence that a transparent consciousness was possible, or even that people could change their world. His lasting and evident influence was his deep appreciation and avocation of "participatory democracy", as well as his emphasis on "the position and latent power of black workers".⁷¹ This was to prove increasingly influential with those, particularly in Natal, who would later come to constitute Fosatu's leadership.

The French student movement, large sections of which wanted to foster a radical workers movement, had particular resonance with white Anglophone students at South African universities – a connection that was bolstered by the direct link provided by Turner.⁷² Of particular importance was the way that French students had sought to bridge the gap between workers and students, especially during the factory occupations of 1968.

However, as Webster argues,⁷³ perhaps a more decisive influence was the contemporary student movement in England, and the existence of a parallel "strong student-worker theme" there. If Turner was important so were other returnees. For example, Phillip Bonner, while admitting that he had visited Turner's house,⁷⁴ remembers that he was less influenced by Turner than by others in Tuacc.⁷⁵ One of the more important influences was the French-trained American neo-Marxist Sheldon Leader, based at Wits, an advocate of the Althusserian School. In fact Leader was "anxious to provide theoretical and epistemological

⁷⁰ Since the structuralist Marxist school has its roots in France, it is not surprising that Turner would have come into contact with and understood it, despite the fact that he was far more influenced by the various existentialist and humanist schools of the New Left.

⁷¹ Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History and", p. 38

⁷² Lunn, "Hippies, Radicals and"; Nash, "The Moment of"

⁷³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁴ Turner explored the concepts of communal living, and in fact actually invited various students to share his house.

⁷⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 21 October 2010, Johannesburg

backing for the ‘workerist’ thrust”,⁷⁶ something which, in hindsight, he was rather successful in doing. Michael Nupen was also important – although he argued from a neo-Marxist perspective embedded in the more “humanist” Frankfurt School. Clearly both of these traditions were influential amongst students at Wits, although there was a considerable amount of tension and rivalry between the two schools – which was evidently true in the international New Left as well.

However, it was not only the white students that were exposed to New Left inspired ideas. The University of Natal was one of the only white universities in the 1960s that admitted black students,⁷⁷ who used that space for exploring new ideas. The most commonly influential material for black students was that produced by black Americans in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. This was avidly read by members of the emerging BCM, and there is no doubt that it had an important influence on themes like black pride and self-reliance. The debates in the American movement between cultural nationalists and those who adopted an anti-capitalist line (like the Black Panthers) would also be played out in the BCM. Thus in her memoir, *A Life*, Mamphela Ramphele, partner and then widow of BC leader Steve Biko, recalls circulating and reading several banned books written by American authors, as well as listening to speeches made by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King on tape.⁷⁸

In North America, white students were deeply impressed by the militancy and the dedication of the Black Panthers attempted to create linkages with them – sometimes successfully.⁷⁹ This was true for the South African movements as well. However, in 1967, Nusas split on racial lines, with black students expressing frustration at the shallow liberal attitudes of most white students in Nusas. Black students criticised the white students’ ignorance of political struggle and their failure to effectively taken a stand on racism.⁸⁰ Black students thus often considered the radicals to be just another type of white liberal, and went on to form Saso, as a BC alternative to Nusas. For Bonner, Saso was “influential in the sense that [it] left no space for white students”.⁸¹ The leading Saso figure, BC’s key thinker, Biko, advised white students

⁷⁶ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History and”, p. 39

⁷⁷ Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”

⁷⁸ Ramphele, M. 1995. *Mamphela Ramphele: A Life*. David Phillip: Cape Town

⁷⁹ Kitchell, M. 1990. *Berkley in the Sixties* (film). Kitchell Films: Berkeley

⁸⁰ *Dome*, Organ of the University of Natal Student Representative Council, March 27th 1969

⁸¹ At Nusas meeting in Alan Taylor Residences regarding the formation of Saso, white Nusas students (including future Tuacc and Fosatu leaders Halton Cheadle and Dave Hemson) were greeted with jeers of

that the only contribution they could make was to change the way that whites thought; that they should not attempt to involve themselves in black communities. Turner took some of this advice to heart, encouraging his students to engage with whites by knocking on their doors.⁸² However, radical students, particularly those who were later to take up positions in Tuacc and Fosatu, were not prepared to sit back and allow their role to be shunted into obscurity; they continued to engage with the black working class.

Partly as a result of the Saso breakaway, they began looking for new models for understanding apartheid, and to identify a role for themselves. Bonner points out that the attitudes of the black students towards the white, and the position taken by Saso, which excluded whites, “really did propel our move towards Marxism”.⁸³ Class politics seemed to offer a way to support black struggles by building a non-racial, class-based, anti-capitalist movement. A class analysis also enabled whites to work with blacks on a common programme of class struggle. Unlike black lecturers on segregated campuses, who were able to confine their activism largely to campus *precisely* because of their access to a large black student population, these white radicals had few prospects of mobilising masses of white students against apartheid because most whites had no interest in such opposition. Furthermore, after the Nusas split, they had very little access to the black student minority on the white campuses either.

However, it is incorrect to claim, as some have done,⁸⁴ that the embrace of class politics was simply an “instrument” to avoid racial issues. If the Saso/Nusas split helped “propel” white radicals towards class politics, it did not – in itself – *generate* the class-based politics, since this had an earlier history in both the Old Left (and the SACP), and which was also tied into the larger, rising New Left. Secondly, class politics was not a means of *avoiding* race, but rather, a means of engaging with race *differently*. The white New Leftists used a class analysis as a means of promoting the national liberation of oppressed blacks. So, the white New Leftists who would go on to play a profound role in in the Tuacc and in Fosatu were committed to the initiatives as a means of emancipating *black* workers, specifically.

“Hello Baas, Hello Missus” (“Hello Boss, Hello Madam”), and referred to as “intruders”. Shortly after they were forced to leave (*Dome*, 27 March 1969).

⁸² Lunn, “Hippies, Radicals and”

⁸³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 21 October 2010, Johannesburg

⁸⁴ See for example, Ally, S. 2005. “Oppositional intellectualism as reflection, not rejection of power: Wits Sociology, 1975-1989” in *Transformation*, No. 59

Conversely, to set up a simplistic link between white activists and class politics is misleading. Class perspectives were by no means alien to the BCM itself. By the early 1970s, BC writers were talking about the leading role of the black working class in the national liberation struggle, while the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo), which succeeded the first generation of BC formations in 1978, identified itself with "scientific socialism" i.e. Marxism-Leninism, and the goal of a "Peoples Republic" based on central planning and nationalisation.⁸⁵

4.3. Conclusion

Because of South Africa's isolation and atmosphere of censorship, New Left ideas did not arrive until after their heyday elsewhere. Similarly, when they did arrive, they came in a somewhat modified and diluted form. Although the impact of the New Left has been largely ignored in South African scholarship, these ideas did manage to filter into South Africa – particularly through returning émigrés who took up important posts at open universities. The pioneering work of the South African revisionist historians were the first to incorporate and translate these internationally influential ideas into the South African context, followed by various other returnees, which were to have a crucial and lasting influence on the trajectory of workerism.

By the early 1970s, these ideas were influential amongst a section of radicals, and these ideas were key to the diffusion of themes of self-management, working class autonomy, criticisms of the Soviet Union, and a class analysis of South Africa. All of these ideas would play a key role in Tuacc and Fosatu, where many of these white radicals were to become active, and would become important parts of workerism. If at times the ideas were "fuzzy" and "woolly",⁸⁶ this was fairly typical of much of the international New Left. It is important therefore, to note the link between the New Left and what became workerism; moreover, it is not possible to understand workerism unless we understand its relation to global radical politics.

⁸⁵ National Forum. [1983]1991. "Manifesto of the Azanian People" in Lodge, T. and B. Nasson. *All Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. David Phillip: Johannesburg, Appendix D, p. 350-51

⁸⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 21 October 2010, Johannesburg

PART II

Chapter 5

5. Theoretical Framework of Workerism

“I always draw a distinction between Marxism and Marxist-Leninism. Marxist-Leninism is an ideology, you know, of state communism. It really wasn’t what we were about. It was really about using Marx’s tools of analysis”.

(Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010)



Figure 5. *Comrade Moss*. Learn and Teach, May 1989

5.1. Introduction

This chapter kicks off the exploration of the core characteristics of workerism – which forms the basis of the next two chapters as well. It does so through an investigation of the theoretical framework of workerism. This is done partly by building on arguments made previously, and partly by reflecting on arguments made by other authors. In refuting some of these claims, it is reiterated that workerism – although often equated with a particular brand of Marxism – in fact belongs in the far more eclectic milieu of the New Left. Of course, this does not mean that Fosatu was a mere replica of the New Left elsewhere – besides anything,

this would have been impossible given the heavily censored context in which it operated. Nevertheless, only by locating workerism in the New Left is it possible to fully understand the workerists' distinctive approach to theory and its relationship to practice.

Although workerists cannot be said to subscribe to a “common ideological position”¹ if by that we mean a systematically articulated programme or organisational formation, the content of their ideas and practice is sufficiently coherent to constitute a tendency. It also connects them with the international New Left movement. This is fundamental to an identification of what is distinctive about Fosatu's leadership and absolutely central to the examination of workerism. The most overwhelming feature of workerist praxis (and a central component of both workerist theory and strategy) was described by Taffy Adler as “the art of the possible”.² This chapter (and the next) will show that it was the location of workerism within the New Left that provided the foundations for its development.

To restate it, although most respondents in this study admitted some connection to the New Left, many do not call themselves “New Left”. Nevertheless, I have not used self-identification as the basis for this attempt at redefinition. Rather, I have attempted to understand their politics on the basis of the *content* of their ideas and the nature of their practice, and the intellectual lineages of both. It is conceivable, or even likely, that many workerists were unaware of the extent to which their approach to theory and praxis dovetailed with that of the New Left. Nevertheless, it is possible, through an analysis of the theoretical and strategic premises of workerism, to place workerism firmly within the ambit of the New Left.

5.1.1. The New Left, Marxism, and Syndicalism

As discussed in previous chapters, the New Left link of course means that workerism was, at least in part, articulated through the lens of historical materialism, and was certainly indebted to Marxism. However, not only was much of the Marxism in the New Left itself partially shaped by anarchism and syndicalism – as in the works of the early Gramsci – but the New Left itself included a number of other libertarian and socialist influences, among them Sartre, Morris, council communism, and anarchism and syndicalism (See Ch. 4, esp. 4.2.1).

¹ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

² Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

Furthermore, it was an evolving tradition that combined the experience, skills and knowledge of a variety of workers, worker leaders and academics from various parts of the country. As such, workerism comprises at once a critique, a body of thought, and praxis – based in a particular framework and located in an historic and organisational context. It sought, as Nash notes, “to engage with history as a living process rather than a mechanical formula, to found a historical consciousness linking local struggles to global processes, and implant itself in a working-class movement which sought to control its own destiny, openly and democratically, rather than submitting to the authority of nationalism or pseudo-science”.³

There is no doubt that many activists, including those based at the English-speaking universities and associated with Fosatu, identified themselves as “Marxists”, but they also associated themselves with the New Left and events accompanying its emergence abroad. Plaut, for example, argues that “the workerists were products of the 1960s and the union recognition battles of the '70s. They were inspired by the French student revolts of 1968, and owed as much to the *New Left Review* as to *Das Kapital*”.⁴ This is of course to be expected given the (almost) contemporaneous rise of the local “emerging unions” with the international New Left, the new unions and radical academics interface with revisionist historians based in Europe, as well as its overlap with returning émigrés like Rick Turner.

However, it is rare that scholarship located specifically within the genre of industrial sociology has emphasised the New Left connection, or unpacked the New Left tradition in place of reducing it to a form of “Marxism”. This is partially because the dominant tendency in South African scholarship on unions in this period – referred to by Ndlozi as the “Websterian”⁵ tradition – has tended to ignore the overall *political* orientation of trade unions or unionists in favour of analysis of practical and organisational issues, such as strikes, or issues of labour process or restructuring.

The material that has examined the politics of the unions in this period has, as demonstrated in chapter 2, struggled to provide a serious account of that politics precisely because it is confused by contradictory, inconsistent and polemical accounts, in which workerism has been presented in a wide variety of often demonstrably contradictory and inaccurate ways. The

³ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁴ Plaut, “Debates in a Shark Tank”, p. 103

⁵ Ndlozi, M. 2010. “Trade Unionism in South Africa: A critical assessment of trade union strategy. The case of the CWIU, 1987-1999”. Masters Research Report: University of the Witwatersrand, p. 53.

failure to explore the link with the New Left has itself tended to promote a literature that provides only rough sketches of the ideas and praxis to which the workerist current subscribed, and is marked by very little in-depth research. It does not, for the most part, recognise the congruence of its ideas and practices with those popularised by the New Left globally.

5.1.2. Western Marxist Inspiration?

A rare exception to this trend has been the work of Nash, who argued that key figures in what would later be called workerism were involved in “the assimilation of Western Marxism in South Africa”.⁶ For Nash, key to this tradition was its emphasis on the need for a popular consciousness that cultivates an awareness of the need for self-liberation. This is contrasted with “Soviet Marxism”, which focuses more on “the ways in which people’s insight was limited by class interest, tradition, propaganda and prejudice, and relied on a party leadership to bring diverse social forces together in common action, without necessarily challenging the limits of their insight”.⁷ (This echoes Gombin’s argument that Soviet Marxism presents itself as a closed, final and scientific system, failing to utilise Marx’s method in a way that sees theory and praxis as constitutive in a dialectical relationship).⁸

However, Nash stresses that this “assimilation” was shaped by the particularities of the South African political context in the 1970s, where the defeat of overt black political opposition had led to the exile of many of its leaders. Only in this context could white student politics become politically central “with no living history of struggle to draw on”.⁹ In his view, it was “the peculiarities of this assimilation, rather than the ideas which influenced specific individuals,” that “determined the form of this moment of Western Marxism”.¹⁰

Nash goes on to suggest an “essential continuity” between Turner’s ideas of participatory democracy, workplace organising, and a just, socialist future for South Africa (as outlined in *The Eye of the Needle*)¹¹ and the politics of Fosatu.¹² He notes the emphasis placed on

⁶ Nash, “The Moment”, p. 68

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Gombin, “The Origins”

⁹ Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 70

¹⁰ Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 66-67

¹¹ Turner, R. 1978. *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in South Africa*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg

¹² Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 69-70

consciousness, identity, self-activity and democracy, the critique of Marxism-Leninism (and so, of the SACP), and also the lack of a coherent programme.

Nash's analysis is, however, only partially accurate. The impact of Western Marxism on the workerist current is easily verified. In my interviews, the most commonly identified influences included Poulantzas, Gramsci and the South African revisionist scholars. Workerists overtly sympathised with Marxist humanism and E.P. Thompson, as was common for New Leftists. Webster recalled being exposed to "a kind of de-Stalinised Marxism", through which he developed an interest in "the early Marxist writings – the idea of alienation, being expressed in the workplace".¹³ The SACP also stressed the link, although with the intention of deriding it:

The type of Marxist literature they have been able to study is restricted. While some may argue that Poulantzas [sic] and Althusser offer insights into the realm of class structure and ideology, the work of these 'new philosophers' does not offer what is needed to tackle the pressing problems of our political reality.¹⁴

Yet, if a recognition of the Western Marxist influence is necessary, it is not sufficient for understanding workerism. Nash conflates the New Left with Marxism ("Western" or otherwise), neglecting the complicated nature of the New Left and the role of influences in it such as anarchism, syndicalism and Marxism-Leninism. This leads him to overstate his case, as when, for example, he incorrectly suggests that Rick Turner was a "Marxist".¹⁵ Since Nash treats Turner as *the* ideologue of the new unions (a doubtful claim, as Turner's relation to the unions was fraught and eventually broke down), he does not examine workerism on its own terms.

Thus, in setting up the politics of the independent left in South Africa as that of a "distinctive form of Marxism", and then trying to read those politics off the work of Turner, Nash ends up on flimsy grounds. These conflation do not capture the nuances of the movement in South Africa, or the views of workerism. As Nash himself concedes, Turner's Sartrean- and Christian-influenced philosophical "utopianism" was at odds with the self-defining and emphatic pragmatism of the emergent trade union movement, something stressed by almost

¹³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁴ Nhere, "The Dangers", p.79

¹⁵ Nash, "The Moment", p. 68 – 70

all respondents in this study. Moreover, to reduce Turner's politics to a form of Marxism also exaggerates the extent to which his views were framed within a Marxist approach. Sartre was the key influence upon Turner, and Sartre had eclectic influences and a complicated relationship with Marxism. Although he admired the Soviet Union, the tendency (not unique to Nash) to present Sartre as a Marxist is somewhat tendentious. His existentialist framework was profoundly non-Marxist, if we take Marxist to have at the very least some relationship to historical materialism and class analysis. To this it can be added that many of the themes that Turner emphasised in *The Eye of the Needle* were heavily indebted to libertarian ideas, and were explicitly posed in explicitly utopian, rather than historical materialist or Marxist terms, for example:

The essential problem is this: How can we design a set of institutions that will give all individuals power over their own lives without permitting them to exercise power over other people? How can we design political institutions that will give people the maximum freedom to choose what to do with their own lives?¹⁶

Direct references to Marxism are almost entirely absent in Turner. The influences Turner cited with approval here and elsewhere included Christianity, Marcuse and Julius Nyerere, the African socialist.¹⁷ Among the obvious features of his analysis is a tendency to treat South Africa simply through racial categories, rather than through a class analysis. If Turner, then, was an influence on Fosatu, he himself cannot be reduced simply to a Marxist influence.

Moreover, it is simply incorrect to treat Turner as the guru and intellectual leader of the workerists. First, as I have noted before, Ulrich and others have demonstrated that the Tuacc/Fosatu tradition was the product of a wide range of influences. It is simplistic and misleading to reduce the politics of the Tuacc/Fosatu tradition to a single figure like Turner, or to read it off Turner's views rather than its own materials.¹⁸

At the most basic level, many workerist figures stressed their distance from Turner. For Bonner, "he didn't have the influence on me that he did on other people – especially in Durban" because "I just had more in common with people like Johnny Copelyn and later

¹⁶ Turner, *The Eye of the Needle*, p. 35

¹⁷ Also see Turner, R. 1971. *The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought*. SPRO-CAS

¹⁸ Ulrich, "Only the Workers"

Alec Erwin”.¹⁹ This is vindicated by the eventual breakdown of Turner’s relationship to the unions.

Nash also downplays the conflict that emerged between Turner and those involved in Tuacc, particularly Copelyn, over the fate of the IIE. Briefly, Turner and Fischer wanted the IIE to remain independent and external to the burgeoning trade union movement – and essentially under their personal control – providing a broad socialist education to workers that encompassed a variety of topics.²⁰ TUACC argued that the IIE to be incorporated into and controlled by the unions, focussing its energy on providing workers with the training needed for them to organise a strong trade union movement. It also argued that the principle of “workers’ control” should apply to workers’ education.²¹ In the event, the TUACC campaign, headed by Copelyn, was successful. Tragically, Turner was assassinated in 1978 by state forces.

By neglecting to acknowledge the extent of these complexities and antagonisms, Nash’s analysis is insufficient. The workerists were often eclectic and pragmatic, and somewhat disdainful of deep theory or philosophy. In doing this they were part of a strong New left tendency to stress action over theory, to dismiss debates as irrelevant to activity, and to straddle contradictory ideological positions. In my interviews, Fosatu’s workerist leadership typically downplayed their academic backgrounds, and expressed some hostility to overly ideological questions. The common use of the word “esoteric”²² to describe in-depth theoretical discussion and debate is indicative. Theory was invoked of course, but in a distinctive way: according to Bonner, although “you had to vindicate your arguments by reference to these kinds of [Marxist] texts,” our grasp of the material was often “loose and fuzzy”.²³

It is also worth noting here that the Fosatu tradition differs from common characterisations of Western Marxism in other key respects. If Fosatu, like much of the New Left, tended to stress action over theory, in most countries Western Marxism was the opposite: it was excessively academic, and inaccessible, marked by “pure theory, divorced from practical political

¹⁹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 5th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁰ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

²¹ *ibid*

²² Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

activity”.²⁴ Fosatu’s stress on movement building for profound and lasting change in South Africa’s political landscape places it at odds with the mainstream of Western Marxism.

Fosatu’s workerists were purposefully eclectic in their appropriation and application of theoretical and historical influences and very far from trapped by “pure theory”. Asked to define “class”, Adler remarked, “way beyond me!”²⁵ Copelyn actually described the workerists as “amateur” with regard to academic work.²⁶ There was “a lot of creating” in Fosatu, as Bonner asserted, and workerists “created a lot out of our own resources, in our own circumstances, because we were in very particular kinds of circumstances”.²⁷ Moses Mayekiso confirmed this:

It depends on getting something out of this and getting something out of that, and mould your own; not necessarily dogmatically stick to whatever. All those theories belonged to [other theorists] and therefore you have to build your own South African approach.²⁸

Moreover, while Western Marxism definitely featured in the workerists’ repertoire of theoretical influences, it was only one influence – and was used in a particular way. Interviewees cited a wide range of other influences, including Rosa Luxemburg,²⁹ George Orwell,³⁰ Ernesto Laclau,³¹ Jacques Derrida,³² and various post-Marxists and Eurocommunists.³³ Some also mentioned the impact of Left Communism and Council Communism³⁴ and “literature dealing with anarchist-inspired syndicalist trade unions”³⁵ on their tradition.

²⁴ Femia, J. “Western Marxism” in D. Glaser and D. Walker (ed.) 2007. “Western Marxism” in *Twentieth Century Marxism: a Global Introduction*, Routledge: London and New York, p. 105

²⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²⁶ Teleconference Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

²⁷ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

²⁸ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 5th January 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁰ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

³¹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October, 2010, Johannesburg

³² Teleconference Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

³³ Telephone Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁴ Webster, *op. cit.* Also see HP: AH 1999. Advanced Education Course 1985

³⁵ Copelyn cited in Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 4-5; Foster, *op. cit.*

Indeed, given that Western Marxism defines itself primarily in opposition to Marxism-Leninism, and often in opposition to Marx's own narrow economic determinism,³⁶ it is notable that some respondents in this study actually identified themselves as *Leninists* and claimed to have been inspired by the "classic" Marxist texts including *Capital*. Some of Fosatu's workerist leadership were influenced by Trotskyism,³⁷ and even Maoism.³⁸ This is all very different to what most Western Marxists would condone.³⁹

Nash, in trying to read Fosatu workerism off Turner, thus simplifies and misrepresents a very complicated picture; insofar as Fosatu was influenced by Western Marxism, this was only one of many influences because it was only one thread in the New Left. This also makes the simple conflation of workerism with the assimilation of Western Marxism problematic. Nash attempts to overcome this problem by downplaying the differences between Western Marxism and Marxism-Leninism through the introduction of additional categories. He therefore uses the term "Soviet Marxism" rather than "Stalinism" to denote the continuities between Trotsky and Stalin, and meanwhile, tries to find a Western Marxist in Lenin: he avoids the use of "Marxism-Leninism" because he suggests that "the contrast between Lenin's own thought and Western Marxism depends on a narrow view of Lenin, which ignores crucial parts of his thought after 1914".⁴⁰

The problem is that there are indeed direct continuities between Leninist vanguardism and Stalinist practice, and the Western Marxists often defined themselves in opposition to Marxism-Leninism, including much of Lenin's works, and not just "Stalinism". This is precisely why they drew from the less deterministic and more idealistic and voluntaristic

³⁶ Even the French Structuralist school, and its key figure, Louis Althusser, who claims that history is a process without subjects, "strongly objected the mechanistic materialism of the orthodox Marxists", and its "simplistic model of base and superstructure", by introducing a more complex structural and less linear model (See Femia, "Western Marxism", p. 114). Thus although he was a structuralist, he was not economic since these spheres were understood to be operating with "relative autonomy".

³⁷ According to Sauls, Joe Foster came from a "Unity Movement, Trotskyist, Fourth International position" (Interview with Fred 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth). Mashishi agreed (Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010). Interviews with Taffy Adler, Alec Erwin and Phillip Bonner, however, revealed that there were no Trotskyists in Fosatu's leadership. While Foster himself admits influence, he claims never to have been a member of the Unity Movement, or a convinced Trotskyite. (Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town)

³⁸ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2010, Cape Town

³⁹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁰ Nash, "The Moment", p. 79. Nash is not alone in depicting workerism in this way. Buhlungu, for example, also argues that workerists "presented a critique of Stalinism and looked elsewhere for inspiration" (p. 24) that this democratic tradition was "packaged in the image of neo-Marxism" (Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*, p.44).

threads in Marx's *own* work,⁴¹ rather than from Marxism-Leninism/Communism.⁴² Fosatu's leadership was sharply critical of the Soviet model: for example, its 1985 Advanced Course criticised the USSR for its "preoccupation with the development of the forces of production and its use of centralised political control and terror against all opposition and workers".⁴³

5.2. Workerism as a South African New Left

It is therefore necessary to define workerism in a way that can account for the issues outlined above. How is possible to retain the workerist links to Western Marxism and corresponding focus on identity, culture and consciousness; its opposition to simplistic determinism; strategic pragmatism (and historical significance); (surprising) hostility to theory and "ideology"; theoretical eclecticism and lingering affinity (at times) with Marxism-Leninism (including Maoism and Trotskyism)?

I am to suggesting that this contradictory character cannot be understood unless they are viewed as an expression of the larger politics of the New Left in South Africa (and elsewhere). The New Left comprised both a theoretical and practical component, was eclectic and incorporated a wide variety of ideologies, of which both Maoism and Trotskyism featured quite prominently (to different extents in different places), as did libertarian currents, including anarchism, syndicalism and council communism. It shared with Fosatu an aversion to "ideology" in favour of "action". It was also an international movement, the shape of which was premised largely on its articulation with the exigencies, traditions and specificities of local, regional and national contexts.

Its theoretical component was introduced into the South African industrial relations system primarily by white academics based in Durban and Johannesburg, who were involved, in one way or another, with the British New Left.⁴⁴ Of course, New Left ideas were not completely alien to black workers in South Africa, despite their relative lack of access to information and

⁴¹ The more democratic thread in Marx should not be conflated with the "early Marx". Gouldner has shown that voluntarism and determinism exist throughout Marx's work: See Gouldner, A. 1980. *The Two Marxisms*. Seabury Press: New York. For example, the *Poverty of Philosophy*, written in 1947 (predating the *Communist Manifesto*) claims that 'the windmill gives you society with the feudal lord: the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist'. Nor should the voluntarist thread in Marxism be conflated with the democratic thread: it is arguable, for instance, that Leninist party theory and Stalinist economic planning are both extremely voluntarist, stressing the primacy of politics, ideology and organisation over structural conditions.

⁴² See Femia, "Western Marxism", pp. 99-116

⁴³ See HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. Advanced Course, section on "Capitalism and Planned Economies", p. 4

⁴⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

ideas under apartheid. Many were exposed to the New Left indirectly as a result of their experience with BC, which had, as we have seen, links with the black movements in the US, including its socialist wing. Dube for example, recalled that “in my period of political awakening, there was no ANC, there was no PAC, rather there was the BC movement”,⁴⁵ and Mashishi claimed that BC constituted “an introduction process to politics for most of us”.⁴⁶

5.2.1. The New Left and Ideology

According to Ulrich, because of their eclecticism, Fosatu’s (academic) leadership “did not articulate a coherent position and it is very difficult to define their ideology as a group”.⁴⁷ While the difficulty to which Ulrich refers is a real one, the phrasing simultaneously provides an important insight into *understanding* workerism as an expression of the New Left in South Africa: its eclectic approach was *typical* of the larger New Left milieu, and thus, less an obstacle to its definition, than one of its *defining* features. Caute identifies the New Left as “a synthesis of individual idealism and mass activity, but without the fetters of a programmatic orthodoxy”.⁴⁸ Likewise, according to Gombin, “ideology” for the New Left

...means the phenomenon of repression in the realm of the mind... Just as bourgeois sanctif[ied] ideological domination... [so] the revolutionary leaders... conformed slavishly to this pattern by imposing on the proletariat from outside their ideology – the ideology of liberation. The object therefore is not to put forward a new ideology, but to abolish and demystify all ideologies⁴⁹

In the French New Left, “attitudes to “theory” ranged from outright rejection to a mild pragmatic interest”.⁵⁰ This was at least a partial reflection of the dismissal of sort of “hair-splitting analysis” associated with the Old Left, so that “after years of rhetoric from the Communists... they’ve just had enough talk”.⁵¹ In fact, a similar theme is even reflected in the academic work that was popularised by the New Left, typified by E.P Thompson’s assertion that “all knowing is bound up with doing”.⁵² Hausknecht also points to the New Left’s “contempt for ideology”,⁵³ claiming that radicals talked of “ideology” as if it was “a

⁴⁵ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁴⁶ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 12th June 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁷ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p.4-5

⁴⁸ Caute, D. 1988. *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968*, Harper and Row: New York, p. 25

⁴⁹ Gombin, “The Origins”, p. 20

⁵⁰ Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, *Long March*, p. 94

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² E.P Thompson cited in Femia, “Western Marxism”, p.104

⁵³ Hausknecht cited in Isserman, *If I had a Hammer*, p. 77

plague... from which we had been mercilessly delivered”.⁵⁴ Thus, if “defin[ing] their *ideology* as a group”⁵⁵ is difficult, this difficulty derives, I would argue, precisely from the aversion and scepticism of those in the New Left to “ideology” (defined as the dogmatic and rigid acceptance of pre-defined formulas for action).

There are of course a number of other important elements of workerism that testify to this connection with the New Left. Firstly, all respondents actually admit some connection and influence – direct or indirect – to the New Left. For example, Bonner claims to have “plugged in” to the international movement, although most would agree with him that such links didn’t occur “in a systematic way”,⁵⁶ which was partly a factor of South Africa’s isolation. Secondly, all respondents made reference to the “Stalinism” of the SACP – like the New Left who viewed the Soviet Union and any party close to it with suspicion. Mayekiso for example claims that “we felt that the SACP was dogmatically following this Russian... Stalinist approach... and the Stalinist approach was not necessarily good for the workers, the ordinary workers”.⁵⁷ Likewise, the commonly invoked notions of “participatory democracy”, “people’s power” and “worker power” in the South African context echo the terms championed by the international New Left, and which are tied to the radical traditions of anarchism, syndicalism, libertarian Marxism and the like.

Third, the theoretical inspiration for workerism is located far more within literature popular in the New Left than with the “Old”. For example, Bonner identifies Gramsci as Fosatu’s main theoretical influence.⁵⁸ As with Korsch and Lukacs, Gramsci’s work was rediscovered by the New Left due to its focus on culture and consciousness over purely economic considerations – a popular theme within New Left circles. Fanon, Althusser, Poulantzas and Laclau (identified as influential by several respondents) were also far more likely to be read by the New Left than the Old. The Gramsci with which these workerists was most familiar (as was the case for the New Left more generally), was the Gramsci who stressed counter-hegemonic struggle, self-empowerment and workers councils – rather than the Gramsci who, as a leading figure in the Italian Communist Party (PCI), supported Stalin against the Left

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ Ulrich, “The Origins” p. 5, emphasis added

⁵⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁷ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁸ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

Opposition and argued on orthodox Leninist lines that it was from the vanguard party (the “modern prince”) that counter-hegemonic struggle is introduced into the working class.

Furthermore, a central notion within the workerist movement was the attempt to define a new politics – one that was not simply a reproduction of “dogma” as laid out by Marx, or a revolutionary strategy as laid out by Lenin. According to Gombin, revolutionary theory in the era of the New Left “no longer precedes social action but follows it, or at best runs parallel to it”.⁵⁹ This sort of sentiment was present amongst Fosatu’s workerist leadership also. For example, says Barrett, “the dominant view was definitely not that this was about keeping politics out of the federation, but rather *finding a new politics, and not simply latching onto establishment politics*”.⁶⁰ This sentiment was echoed by Adler, who maintained that there was a general view that “we were indigenous and developing this stuff on our own”,⁶¹ as well as by Bonner. Barrett also points to a general lack of interest in pre-established revolutionary theories – which were not generally brought into discussion at the formal level or to a great extent informally.⁶² Likewise Mashishi claims that “there was no programme that was philosophical or theory-driven” in Fosatu.⁶³ Fanaroff points out how theory was consciously subordinated to the needs of organisation, demoted to the status of a tool for more *pragmatic* ends: “I used to talk about surplus value and class and whatever, you know, it was very intimately tied up with the way we organised people. We used it as an *organising tool*”.⁶⁴

Adler echoes Gombin’s previously-cited sentiments precisely with regard to the relationship between theory and practice, saying that whilst having read, for example, Heribet Adam (a liberal analyst of South Africa), or O’Meara (a structuralist Marxist revisionist writer on South Africa), they were not “trying to mould that into some sort of theoretical action” or “theoretical framework that would motivate action”.⁶⁵ Rather, according to Adler, “*I think it worked the other way around*”.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Gombin, “The Origins”, p. 16

⁶⁰ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg, emphasis mine

⁶¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶² Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg, emphasis mine

⁶³ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁴ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg, emphasis mine

⁶⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg, emphasis mine

⁶⁶ *ibid*, emphasis added

Thus, while Nash argues that Fosatu viewed political theory as arising from an independent or external analysis,⁶⁷ matters were in fact more complicated. If workerism was influenced by Marxist analyses, one of the most striking features of workerism was its willingness to challenge orthodoxy, *including* Marxist orthodoxy – which was expressed in a remarkable tactical and strategic flexibility, a “practice” that *was* indigenous and creative. However, where Nash is correct, and this was probably a major weakness in workerism is that fact that these ideas were never properly formulated into a *coherent* “body of thought” and “argument” that could be the basis for a unified, properly conceived and consistent “practice” and programme i.e. the absence of an adequate consideration of how clear “body of thought, argument and practice” could be built in the South African context.⁶⁸

Workerism thus followed the New Left in using Marx’s tools of analysis where convenient, but it had little in the way of a solid, stated programme, Marxist or otherwise. It was also more interested in theory as a “guide” rather than a “roadmap”,⁶⁹ predominantly informed by, *rather than informing*, practice. Thus, according to Barrett, “nobody in Fosatu really pretended to have a clear roadmap for where it was going to go”.⁷⁰ This was linked, as it was for most in the New Left, to scepticism towards theory in general. If considered within this context and within the context of the ideas of the New Left more broadly, it is easy to understand the sometimes contradictory, heterodox and “fuzzy” character of the thought to which the workerists subscribed and the contradictory praxis they developed as a result.

This approach, in which theory is closely connected with action (and where theory is only useful insofar as it enables change), or in Webster’s words, “theory and practice were merged in an emancipatory project”,⁷¹ was absolutely central to the New Left as it was to workerism. All workerists testified to their “instinctive”⁷² or “pragmatic” (as opposed to “doctrinaire”⁷³ or “theoretical”⁷⁴) praxis, and even *Fosatu Worker News* remarked that “ALL TALK AND NO ACTION IS A DANGEROUS GAME!”.⁷⁵ Furthermore, rather than speaking in abstract

⁶⁷ Nash, “The Moment of”. This seems to be reiterated by Haysom who questions the treatment of theory by Fosatu as “a single ‘true line’ to be imported by intellectuals into the unions” (Haysom, “In search of Concessions” p. 41)

⁶⁸ Nash, “The Moment of”, p. 71

⁶⁹ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁷⁰ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁷¹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷² Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March, 2010, Johannesburg

⁷³ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ *Fosatu Worker News*. 1982. “Editorial”, March edn., emphasis original

theoretical terminology, workerists generally tended to answer questions in historically and contextually specific terms. In discussing the workerist understanding of the state, for example, Adler maintained that “from a pragmatic point of view... it’s the easiest thing in the world for workers to perceive, as we did... the position that the state is the agent of capital”.⁷⁶ Erwin likewise stressed with reference to how apartheid was theorised, “These are not abstract propositions that just float in history”.⁷⁷

5.2.2. Local assimilations, convergences and pragmatism

So, the assimilation of New Left ideas was shaped by the traditions and contexts into which they were absorbed, and their influence on the new unions would not have been possible if their approach was not compatible and complementary to practices and approaches already being developed. For example, while a commitment to participatory democracy and a grassroots approach to organisation were key feature in the New Left, these notions were congruent with the democratic practices developed indigenously by workers and worker leaders in Tuacc and the GFWBF.

Likewise the sense of pragmatism and commitment to “direct action” that workerists derived from the New Left dovetailed neatly with the experience brought into the federation by the “organic intellectuals” based in the Cape: “The Eastern Cape motor unions,” Numarwosa and UAW, “brought with them a unique set of experiences into Fosatu”, including “an understanding of industry-wide organisation, together with a sense of pragmatism and *power* not shared by the rest of the unions”.⁷⁸ This is why the “the motor unions did not shrink from registration or the industrial councils” – they saw “way they could be turned round and used for the opposite purposes to which they were designed”.⁷⁹

Although Bonner noted that the Tuacc unions “had an entirely different lineage”, their position on registration was remarkably similar. For example, in the Tuacc unions “registration was judged according to its ability to facilitate or obstruct” the central goals as laid out by the unions, while Fosatu argued that registration merely altered “union scope”, but that “the only changes made were made by the unions themselves”.⁸⁰ Both approaches

⁷⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March, 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁷ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁷⁸ Bonner, “The Independent Unions”, p. 23, emphasis original

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ HP: AH 2065 D4.1. Fosatu Transvaal Region: Policy on Registration, p. 2

treated legislation and government bodies, not as obstacles preventing successful unionism, but as possible *opportunities* for furthering the aims of the union movement by turning them “inside out”. As such, both approaches were essentially pragmatic; they rejected rigidity with regard to what they saw as tactical problems. (In fact, what many may perceive as questions of principle, workerists often perceived at tactics).

Being located at the convergence between these various forces, workerism can only be understood in the context of the assimilation of ideas, organisational forms and practices incubating within the New Left on the one hand, and on the other, the surprisingly similar ideas, organisational forms and practices already established by the existing union movement in South Africa.

5.3. Conclusion

The pragmatic approach to theory, strategy and tactics displayed by workerists is probably one of the most central and self-defining aspects of workerism: a true “art of the possible”.⁸¹ It is this that clearly distinguishes them from other currents, including local Trotskyism (which was often highly dogmatic) and the Marxism of the SACP. While workerists were influenced by theories like Marxism, they had the sort of pragmatic, action-oriented praxis more appropriate to sentiments popular in the New Left. As was common in this milieu, workerists saw themselves as “practitioners”⁸² not ideologues, and thus eschewed “orthodoxy” and “ideology” in favour of using, say, the historical materialist method as a tool of analysis without “dogmatically” adhering to the Marxist doctrine or following Lenin’s revolutionary strategy.⁸³

So, a *coherent* theory of existing South African society and a corresponding theory and strategy for long-term transformative change that united all the workerist leaders, is notable only for its *absence*. Nevertheless, although Fosatu’s praxis was far more pragmatic than ideological, where it was necessary for Fosatu to formulate a theoretical response to a practical problem, theoretical analysis *was* forthcoming. Thus there were cases in which

⁸¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ See Gombin, “The Origins”.

attempts were made to theorise elements of the reality. The following chapter is thus a systematic discussion of the core theoretical features of workerism.

Chapter 6

6. Elements of Workerism: Theory and Analysis

“Theory is the force that guides the activity of individual people and individual organisations along a specific route towards a specific goal... Activity... both in general and in detail, must be perfectly consistent with the theoretical principles professed”

The “Dielo Trouda” Group. 1926. Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

“I mean it’s just so interesting. I remember when I read your questions, thinking that these are such important questions... I don’t think any of us in our wildest imaginations imagined that we would see it in our lifetime, let alone in six years time. So, you know, things happened so fast... and of course because things were happening so fast, the political debate also got very, um, what’s the word... oversimplified in a way.” Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010



Figure 6. Celebrating Counter-Culture: Fosatu worker choir. Fosatu Archives. AH 2680/H5

6.1. Introduction

This chapter undertakes discussion of the theoretical and analytical components of workerism while illustrating how these were articulated by way of tactical decisions. In the previous chapter it was argued that workerism was far more a product of the New Left than many accounts seem to acknowledge. This claim is made with reference to the peculiar, sometimes hostile, attitude workerists displayed to theory and the way in which theory and practice were

understood to be fused into an emancipatory project. This sets them apart from the more doctrinaire praxis of the mainstream South African left represented by the SACP, as well as some more marginal groups (like for example the local Trotskyist tendencies). Whilst workerists were hesitant to subscribe to any political doctrine, they did formulate theory when it was necessary for practice.

This chapter looks at the various aspects of the workerist “theory”, touching on issues such as workerist understandings of the apartheid and capitalism, class, race and gender, the state, vanguardism and the role of trade unions in the struggle for socialism, the nature of “politics” and political struggle, culture and consciousness, workerist assessments of rival tendencies like nationalism and the ANC, as well as internationalism. By examining workerist analyses of these issues, it is shown that a distinctive set of ideas, formed in response to a particular set of circumstances, common to all workerists, can be discerned, and secondly, that these should be understood as located firmly in the New Left.

The location of workerism within the New Left meant that the theoretical insights of workerism were pragmatically and eclectically appropriated from various theoretical doctrines, including Marxism. This was expressed in occasional disjunctures between theory and practice, a corresponding willingness to dismiss accepted notions where they didn’t fit (including from Marxism), and a willingness to ignore the supposed limitations these notions imposed on its practice – all of which resulted, in practical terms, in a free flowing tactical flexibility - “the art of the possible”.¹

6.2. Apartheid and Capitalism

6.2.1. The South African Revisionist Historians and CST theory

Central to workerism was an attempt to develop a “materialist position and the question of how it applied to one’s own country”.² These analyses and positions were formulated by drawing heavily on the work of the South African revisionist school,³ which was closely linked to British academic New Left circles.

¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

² Telephone Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

³ Interviews with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

The revisionist school was important because it broke with the dominant liberal interpretation of South African society and history. Not only was the school located within the New Left milieu, but also it was central in importing New Left ideas into South Africa, and in incorporating these ideas into its analyses of South Africa (See Chapter 4). It was also one of the major catalysts for the growth of an “indigenous left”⁴ inside the country, of which Fosatu’s workerist leadership is part. According to Nash, this group comprised those who attempted to develop a structuralist understanding of South African history, premised on the work of Poulantzas; those who sought to develop an alternative, “humanist” history based centrally on the work of Thompson; and those that fitted into neither camp.⁵ Importantly, despite the rather stark differences between structuralist and humanist conceptions, workerism was influenced by and adopted analyses from both. Thus, according to Phillip Bonner, “We were very sort of structuralist, instrumentalist for a time”, after which ideas which allowed for agency were “increasingly taken on board”.⁶ This, again, is perfectly consistent with the pragmatic and eclectic approach so characteristic of the workerists, as described in the previous chapter.

Apart from the emerging trade unions, one of the key institutions of this “indigenous left” was the local History Workshop. It involved a number of key figures identified with workerism, among them Bonner, Bozzoli and Webster. During the 1980s the History Workshop hosted a series of what they called “Public Culture Days”⁷ in which the “university was thrown open to the wide public”, but, in particular, the Fosatu unions.⁸ This was intended to breakdown academic/worker distinctions, and of course also publicly symbolised the History Workshop’s close links to the unions. Bonner, who served for years as the Workshop’s director, recalls the “power of that sort of cultural day”, where “workers came out from everywhere” and basically just “took over the university”.⁹

⁴ Bozzoli and Delius, “Radical History”

⁵ Nash, “The Moment”

⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁷ There are significant parallels between these and the seminars organised by the March 22nd movement in France, comprising Marxist, sexual liberation and anarchist currents. The latter organised university-based seminars on a wide range of topics, including “Culture and Creativity” (See Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, *Long March*). The focus on culture, so central to sections of the New Left, is also significant.

⁸ History Workshop, official website, available at

<<http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/socialsciences/8324/historyworkshop.html>>

⁹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

Central to the revisionist project and incorporated into workerist analyses was the attempt to reinterpret – and then rewrite – South African history by highlighting class relations (often understood, ironically, in basically economic terms) as the basis of a new theory of apartheid. Those involved in the radical challenge to historiography raised objections to the then dominant liberal race-based analyses that they claimed failed to explain central processes in apartheid South African society.¹⁰ For the revisionists, apartheid, far from being incompatible with capitalism (the position that dominated liberal university campuses and historical scholarship), was in fact quite compatible (even functional) to the process of capitalist accumulation in South Africa. Therefore, revisionist scholars set about dismantling the liberal notion that the free market, if left unfettered, would eventually dismantle the structures of racial discrimination.

The impact of European events in the late 1960s and 1970s on the work of these revisionists was formative, as on the development of the workerist current.¹¹ Along with the 1968 revolts, the academic writing of a new generation of libertarian theorists was inspirational. In particular, the work of Thompson, a key figure in both the first and second New Lefts in Britain, was massively influential in British intellectual circles, of which the revisionists were part. *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson's seminal text, published in 1963,¹² had a "profound effect" on revisionists like "Johnstone and others, with its stress on the importance of class as a relationship and therefore an historical phenomenon".¹³ This influence was transmuted into workerism too; Fosatu published a series in the same name ("The Making of the Working Class") in *Fosatu Worker News*, written by Bonner, which applied this approach to South African history.

Largely due to this historiographical "revolution", the workerists were able to develop an understanding of society and a basis for practice grounded in class analysis. According to Bonner, "in searching for an explanation" for "the acute repression of the place", "it seemed that race just wasn't enough".¹⁴ It was this understanding of the centrality of class in social relations (without being crudely determinist) that led Fosatu to criticise the historical liberation movement for erroneously positioning "the government and Afrikanerdom" as

¹⁰ Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History"

¹¹ The spread of this influence was uneven. For example, Copelyn reports a strong influence, while Bonner underemphasises its influence.

¹² Thompson, *The Making of*

¹³ Saunders, *The Making of*, no page numbers

¹⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

their “focus of attack”,¹⁵ allowing capital “to hide behind politics” and permitting “sophisticated attacks on labour because no-one is paying any attention”.¹⁶ Thus, Fosatu criticised the fact that while “capital and labour” are “the major forces”, historically “politically the struggle [was] being fought elsewhere”.¹⁷

The various revisionist interpretations were not only antithetical to the then-accepted liberal model, but they differed fundamentally from the official Marxism of the Soviet Union and therefore the party line of the SACP. The SACP had from the 1950s argued for the “Colonialism of a Special Type” (CST) thesis, which held that South Africa was operating essentially under colonial conditions, being *internally* colonised by the resident, permanently settled, whites. In line with Lenin’s view that colonialism had become a brake on the development of the forces of production,¹⁸ the SACP took as its main aim not socialism, but a transition to the non-racial “national democratic” capitalist stage.

What CST meant was that this struggle was not waged between distinct territories, colony and metropole, but *within* the borders of one country, between two nations, black and white. This was a struggle for an anti-imperialist but basically bourgeois national democratic revolution that would lay the basis for a transition (later, in a vague future) to “socialism” on Soviet lines.¹⁹ This perspective translated in practice into a displacement of class struggle by racial/“national” struggle, and into unquestioning SACP support for the nationalist ANC, viewed as the vehicle of the first stage, at the head of the largest possible, cross-class, nationalist coalition.

Workerism entailed, besides an orientation towards revisionist conceptions rooted in the New Left, a rejection of this two-stage approach, which highlights the differences between the position adopted by Fosatu’s workerists and the position taken by the SACP and Sactu, which accepted the SACP line. Barrett recalls “tough arguments” she had with SACP and Sactu people in exile during the 1980s, in which she insisted that there existed “a growing belief”, not among “one or two people in a seminar”, but among the “mass membership” that a “different [socialist] world is possible”. According to Barrett, SACP ideologues like Brian

¹⁵ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle: Where does Fosatu Stand? Occasional Publication, No. 5, 1982, p. 12-13

¹⁶ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, *op. cit.*, p. 14

¹⁷ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, *op. cit.*, p. 16

¹⁸ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 94

¹⁹ See SACP. [1962] 1981. “The Road to South African Freedom”

Bunting and Esop Pahad “chose to refuse to believe, let me put it lightly... that there was no discussion on the ground about socialism”, which was for them “the defence for the continued upholding of the position of the two-stage theory”²⁰ and therefore that socialism remained off the agenda until black majority rule in a capitalist South Africa.

According to Erwin, “what we argued was that you could analytically argue that the two-stage theory was flawed,”²¹ because it was based on the false assumption of the incompatibility of apartheid with capitalism – an assumption that, ironically, converged with liberal analyses. The two-stage theory suggested not only that capitalism could survive apartheid (which has proved to be correct), but that apartheid was an archaic brake on the forces of production (which was precisely what the revisionists denied). Drawing on writers like Arrighi and Sauls, workerism tended to hover “more around the French structural school of articulated modes of production and the particular way in which colonisation and imperialism works”.²² According to this view, in Southern Africa, despite a lingering and co-existing pre-capitalist phase, the region is characterised by “the much larger scale of capitalist penetration” in the 19th and 20th centuries than in tropical Africa “and also by the presence of a substantial settler-colonial bourgeoisie” drawn by mineral discoveries.²³

Because, as the thesis goes, it was difficult to bring African labour into the capitalist economy (goods sold for cash were a better return than wage-labour), the solution for the colonial state was the expulsion of the peasantry from their land.²⁴ Thus the workerists “adopted an analysis that the peasantry had essentially been devastated in South Africa, as part of the accumulation process”.²⁵ As such, because of the needs of both pre-capitalist and capitalist modes, southern African states had developed complex mechanisms for labour control that would ensure the functionality of the articulation of these modes of production.

In other words, the persistence of elements of pre-capitalist African societies (and the use of unfree labour in modern industries) was not the result of an incomplete capitalist revolution (to be finished by national democracy), but the *product* of a particular form of capitalism,

²⁰ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

²¹ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

²² Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

²³ Brewer, A. 1990: *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*. Routledge & Kegan and Paul: New York, p. 244

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

which had developed advanced features including a highly developed economy, monopoly capitalism and the export of capital. If this was the case, the first stage posited by the SACP was unnecessary – at least inasmuch as it posited that a *break* with apartheid was necessary for capitalist development.

Wolpe mapped this approach onto South Africa, using a structuralist approach,²⁶ in a work that was, at least initially influential amongst Fosatu's workerist leadership.²⁷ He was one of the first historians to produce work that looked at the "articulation of modes of production", arguing that South Africa was characterised by a dual economic model incorporating both pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production. In Wolpe's thesis, the reserves and the early segregationist policies had served the interests of primary capital through the subsidisation of labour costs of an unskilled workforce through the migrant labour system: the African reserves would be responsible for social reproduction, as families would remain there farming, while men moved forward and backward from industry.

This was directly incorporated into Fosatu education material, which explained that

...the homestead gave the migrant part of what he needed to survive. The capitalists were quick to see the advantage... the capitalists paid the worker less than they needed to survive. The rest was provided for the capitalist 'free' from the rural family. Thus we say that migrants earned structural low wages.²⁸

With the introduction of manufacturing capital, Wolpe suggested, the need for a more stable and semi-skilled workforce produced the need for apartheid proper, which included a whole series of measures – including Bantu education and policies to curb urbanisation while simultaneously condoning a small urban population – to ensure the continued functionality of both primary and secondary industry. Again, this was repeated by Fosatu: "passes were introduced to perform two functions: to block more women from coming to town and thereby to keep the system of migrant labour working" and "to tie women to men in a very rigid way"

²⁶ Wolpe, H. 1972. *Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From segregation to apartheid*. Vol. 1, No. 4. Wolpe was, in fact, linked to the SACP but he broke with the SACP's stress on race and on the supposedly feudal features of the South African economy.

²⁷ Teleconference Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

²⁸ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. "Women Workers", p. 10; See also TULEC. Salha. 8 c2: Fosatu. *Fosatu Bulletin*. "The recession and Retrenchments", 5th November 1984

thereby locking women into their “nuclear family situations”.²⁹ Likewise, the compound system was devised to “make sure there was a disciplined and regular labour force” and to “keep black workers divided from white”.³⁰ The move from the separatism of Jan Smuts to apartheid proper of the Afrikaner nationalists was thus the result of “increasingly systematic repression in the interest of more sophisticated parts of the capitalist project”.³¹

The workerist approach therefore deviated from official (SACP) Marxist-Leninism in several ways. First, it viewed racial subjugation as compatible with, even functional to, South African capitalism – as opposed to the SACP analysis in which colonialism (here, CST) is seen as holding back the full development of the productive forces (and so needed to be overthrown by means of the NDR). Similarly, it rejected the crude Marxist notion that the development of the productive forces under capitalism would tend towards the homogenisation of the working class, and that “most of the union leadership felt these divisions remained very useful for capital and that what would move capital was worker power”.³²

Although many of those I interviewed identified the revisionists as theoretical influences, or had at the least read some of their work, only Erwin actually articulated the relationship by means of this complex, and rather academically-inclined, formulation. This is, I would argue, a symptom of the New Left-derived commitment to “action” and pragmatism and scepticism of “pure theory”. Copelyn for example, claims that he “was never a great academic” although he admits to being “interested in what they had to say” and seeing that “it must be right... to look into the structural issues and the ways in which the media and other superstructural pieces are colonised to reproduce a hegemonic project” but argued that “practically speaking, it led to armchair politics”.³³

What is important for the purposes of this report is that at a very basic level, these formulations were generally accepted as holding true for all workerists, although they were “more instinctual and pragmatic than theoretical”.³⁴ Thus, apartheid, and the “whole migrant labour scene” was “very well understood” as central to the development of capitalism, both

²⁹ TULEC. Salha. 8 c2: Fosatu. *Fosatu Bulletin*. “The recession and Retrenchments”, 5th November 1984

³⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11, Telegram from Phillip Bonner: “The Divided Working Class”

³¹ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

³² Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

³³ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

³⁴ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

“as a labour control mechanism” and “as a mechanism for absorbing functionaries” in the Bantustans/homelands, and urban black town councils.³⁵

All workerist respondents in this study shared the understanding that, far from being tangential to (as some more nationalist analyses might claim) or inimical to capitalism (as both the liberal and SACP interpretations suggested), historically apartheid was quite compatible with capitalist development.

6.2.2. Workerism and Stages of history

Strategically, this understanding of the relationship between apartheid and capitalism produced a rejection by both workerist academics and workerist worker-intellectuals of the SACP’s two-stage strategy. They did not, however, necessarily reject Marxist notions of history as proceeding through stages, with only an advanced stage enabling socialist transformation. Most Fosatu workerists “thought in stages”,³⁶ and subscribed to “a Marxist thing about when the time is right – the factors and forces of production and so on”.³⁷

However, workerism, while maintaining Marx’s historical schema, qualified it with a sense of the need for the self-activity of the working class in making its own destiny – through unions, not armed struggle or party vanguards. This places it far more within the ambit of the New Left than the “Old”. Fosatu thus saw that there “are some important factors that are favourable to the development of a working class movement in South Africa... this *does not mean that this will happen automatically*”.³⁸

So while Fosatu understood the march of history in fairly linear terms, history was not devoid of human subjects, who could develop the need for their own liberation and the political ability to capitalise on a revolutionary moment should it arise.³⁹ (In fact, this marked a break with Wolpe himself, who tended to view state policies as purely functional to capitalism, and downplayed popular agency in shaping both capitalism and the state).⁴⁰

³⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁷ Adler, *op. cit.* Also see Erwin, 1985. “The Question of Unity in Struggle” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 67 as an example.

³⁸ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 7, emphasis added

³⁹ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁰ As a critic has noted, the 1948 election of the apartheid government was not inevitable: it was enabled by the vagaries of electoral politics, and, specifically, an unexpected swing in a tiny number of white constituencies.

The workerist objection to the two-stage strategy was derived partly from the view that it was “a waste of time, a waste of energy and a waste of people’s blood”,⁴¹ and partly from the understanding that “there are not two stages, but stages, continuous”,⁴² which raised the question of “at what stage do you say now we are ready to say that we are ready to graduate to the next level?”.⁴³ Erwin saw the explanation deriving from the fact that most workerists were influenced by Lenin and “the Chinese” whose “proposition” was that “if you were the weakest link of the imperialist chain, and your bourgeoisie was relatively weak, you could move with one movement... from an... anti-imperial struggle into a phase of socialism”.⁴⁴ The problem with the two-stage theory, for the workerists, was their “suspicion ... that once you’ve had the first stage you’d never have the second stage”.⁴⁵

6.2.3. Cultural Hegemony and Struggle

If the basic structuralist position on the compatibility of apartheid and capitalism was accepted, then, it was supplemented by a more humanistic conception of the durability of capitalism derived from those elements of Gramsci.⁴⁶ Here, Gramsci argued that “class domination is not sustained exclusively by economic wealth and political power”⁴⁷ as some cruder Marxist interpretations posited. Instead, class rule is concurrently sustained through legitimacy and consent – whereby “ruling groups try to make their own culture into the socially dominant culture”.⁴⁸ This suggests a “more fluid, contingent, agent-centred and

For more on the contingency of apartheid, and critique of Wolpe, see Posel D. 1983. “Rethinking the 'race-class debate' in South African historiography” in *Social Dynamics* volume 9 number 1, pp. 50-66.

⁴¹ Alexander, P. 1985. “Towards a Workers’ Party: Interview with Moses Mayekiso” in *Socialist Worker Review*, No. 80, October edn.

⁴² Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁴³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁴⁴ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town. Stalin’s two-stage approach was rather more complicated than Erwin admits: “the Chinese” Marxists framed their position fundamentally within Stalin’s model, which is one reason that they viewed Khrushchev’s 1956 denunciations as *revisionist* i.e. a *break* with the real Marxist tradition, which was *exemplified* by Stalin.

⁴⁵ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁴⁶ Despite the seemingly stark differences between the humanist and structuralist models, these differences are far more superficial than they seem. Poulantzas drew on Gramsci in order to construct his theory of the state, the central thrust of which revolves around the way that the state seeks to sustain capitalist relations not only through domination, but also through consent – which it obtains by co-opting a “fraction” of the oppressed classes. While the workerists were initially more located within the milieu of structuralist interpretations, and thus “very sort of functionalist, instrumentalist for a time”, ideas which afforded agency to the working class, and understood it as an agent in its own identity construction, were gradually an increasingly “taken on board” to the point where they featured centrally in Fosatu’s strategy for transformation. (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg)

⁴⁷ Seidman, S. 2004. *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*, Blackwell Publishing: United Kingdom. p.136

⁴⁸ Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, p. 137. Gramsci termed this “cultural hegemony”. The theory emphasises the subtle, non-coercive yet pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that serve to reinforce relations of exploitation and facilitate the perseverance of capitalism. In particular, Gramsci referred to the ways in which

culturalist view of social life than was to be found in classical Marxism”,⁴⁹ in which, by accepting the culture of the ruling classes as its own, the subordinate class is an important force in shaping society.

Fosatu’s leadership did acknowledge the power afforded to the state by its coercive apparatuses.⁵⁰ But this stress on ideological domination was also fundamental to the workerist conception of South African society – and implied a “battle for morality or legitimacy between liberation movement and ruling regime”.⁵¹ Precisely because “the media are... not politically neutral”,⁵² Fosatu dedicated a substantial part of its very limited resources to the development of an education project designed to stimulate the production of a counter-hegemonic working class culture. (I use the term “counter-hegemony” here because the workerists referenced Gramsci. However, Gramsci’s notion of counter-hegemony was drawn from anarchists and syndicalists who dominated the Italian revolutionary left in the years of the young Gramsci. The ways in which Gramsci was understood, and the relationship between Gramsci and the anarchists and syndicalists, is discussed at length in Chapter 8).

Revisionist and labour history was also an important tool used by the workerists in the building of a counter-hegemonic project. Bonner (an historian) recalls being “asked to deliver the opening address on the history of trade unions in South Africa” at Fosatu’s inauguration, which he claims “had a definite intent and message”.⁵³ Fosatu’s various worker newspapers and cultural days, its clothing unit, theatre and poetry events were also “instrument[s] in building a worker identity”⁵⁴ capable of constituting a counter-hegemonic force to that constructed by the ruling groups. (This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8).

6.3. Class, Race and Gender

the culture, morality and philosophy of the ruling class permeate throughout the institutions of capitalist society and become hegemonic, that is, they become the “common sense” culture of the subordinate and exploited classes. The breakdown of the grip of bourgeois culture on the working class therefore required the construction of counter-hegemonic culture – an ideological struggle existing alongside the struggle for structural revolution. (See Boggs, K. 1976. *Gramsci’s Marxism*. Pluto Press: United States)

⁴⁹ Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, p. 138

⁵⁰ See for example Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 66

⁵¹ Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 57

⁵² Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 58

⁵³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁴ *ibid*

6.3.1. The Working Class

At a general level, Fosatu's workerist leadership accepted a basically Marxist definition of class premised on ownership of the means of production, the "extraction of surplus value and the "location of workers" in this process.⁵⁵ Therefore, workerism adopted "a fairly doctrinaire view of people being workers even if they were managers as long as they were being exploited".⁵⁶ Fosatu's non-racial policy (central to the workerist praxis) is an explicit reference to this position; based on the understanding that "the working class has no colour".⁵⁷ Thus Fosatu questioned whether "racial divisions and racial oppression" were "more fundamental than the exploitation of say, Indian workers by Indian businessmen".⁵⁸ But here again workerism contains within it a pervasive pragmatism; a distaste for "armchair politics".⁵⁹ Many workerists deny "having long debates about what is class and what is politics and so on",⁶⁰ primarily because "we were far more taken up with building the unions and building Fosatu and building unity".⁶¹

Again, however, the workerist definition of class can be distinguished from the narrow focus on industrial workers sometimes espoused under the rubric of Marxism-Leninism. For example, Fosatu's leadership tended to describe the working class in more expansive terms, including some sections of what Marx and Lenin would have regarded as strictly non-proletarian. Thus Sauls defined the working class as "anybody who had to work for a living", which included the unemployed, domestic and farm workers, and even foremen and the managerial class.⁶² Mayekiso agreed, although he also included "those people who are having little bits of business or *spaza* shops [small family businesses in the townships]" which he claimed "you don't regard them as belonging to the capitalist class" because "they are just a section that is working to live".⁶³ Adler recalls that "every now and again you might talk about migrants and what their role would be, but you would definitely see them as

⁵⁵ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁶ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁵⁷ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁸ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3. Labour Studies Courses, "Trade Unions and Popular Movements", p.25

⁵⁹ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁰ Fanaroff, *op. cit.*; Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹ Fanaroff, *op. cit.*

⁶² Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁶³ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

workers”,⁶⁴ despite the fact that they still owned (modest) means of production in the form of Reserve homesteads.

Elements such as teachers, doctors and lawyers were also generally identified as being fundamentally working class, although they belonged to a “separate category”⁶⁵ of “intellectual workers”.⁶⁶ As in Marx’s analysis, because these strata tended to exhibit “their own consciousness as a group of professionals – “a consciousness that would tell them that they aspire to belong with the capitalist ruling class so as to benefit from that class”⁶⁷ and therefore “associate [themselves] with the owners of the means of production”.⁶⁸ They would therefore only *potentially* be allies, given their ideological predilections. Similarly, some workerists adopted a far less hostile attitude towards peasants than did Marx – in some cases seeing them as part of the working class.⁶⁹ (Others, like Erwin, distinguished between the peasantry and the working class, but nevertheless argued that “to the extent that they existed... they would clearly be allies, which one would have to work with”.⁷⁰)

This evidence runs counter to Joe Slovo’s claim (and substantiates Mosenthal’s counter-opinion) that workerists viewed alliances with other strata as “an abandonment of socialist struggle and working class leadership”.⁷¹ It also brings similar accusations by *Isizwe* into question, for example that workerism entailed “very defeatist, passive attitude towards the oppressed, black petty bourgeoisie, and middle strata in our country”.⁷²

In some regards then, workerism converged with anarchist and syndicalist understandings of the working class – currents that ran through the New Left. The anarchist Bakunin, while not ignoring the key strategic priority of the industrial workforce, included in his definition of the working class, “the great rabble of the people” who Marx “dismissed as a criminal lumpen proletariat”.⁷³ Similarly, it is clear that Fosatu understood the “working class” as going well beyond its members, or organised workers as a whole; these were just another “category”⁷⁴ of

⁶⁴ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁵ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁶ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁹ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town; see also Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 61.

⁷¹ Cited in Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 86

⁷² *Isizwe*, “the Errors”, p. 61

⁷³ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 59.

⁷⁴ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

workers. This is confirmed by Foster who differentiated between thinking narrowly of “our members” and “more widely of the working class”.⁷⁵ This also contradicts the accusation by Von Holdt, for example, that Fosatu “persistently conflated” the trade union with the working class.⁷⁶

However, there is a dislocation between these stated conceptualisations and Fosatu’s practice – again, this is symptomatic of the general eclecticism, pragmatism and eschewal of systematic theorisation of the workerists. These class conceptualisation did not inform Fosatu’s actions in any meaningful way, which provided the basis for critics to assert that the workerists ignored the larger ranks of the oppressed and exploited. Like Lenin and Mao, who looked to the peasantry as allies, but not take their role seriously, workerism tended to stress that non-worker sections are “not a key force in the liberation struggle”.⁷⁷ This claim was based partly on the acceptance that there were “no great landlords” or “no significant peasantry”⁷⁸ in South Africa, but it also clearly derives from the Marxist claim that the peasantry (and other oppressed sections) must “take their lead from the working class”.⁷⁹

Thus, while not necessarily dismissing, say, the peasantry or the unemployed as “reactionary” forces, workerists largely ignored them, and in practice focussed their energies on the industrial proletariat:

We were seeking the locus of power. So I think if you are looking for something distinctive for Fosatu, its really looking for power - in a very concrete way – and not in a loose and rhetorical way. Now power is on the factory floor; that’s what we all believed. That united all of us.⁸⁰

While this formulation is not incorrect given the important strategic location at the point of production of the industrial workforce in any capitalist economy, it does tend to underestimate the potential power and importance of other sections, both abstractly and historically in South Africa, and thus had important implications for the workerist project. Where this manifested most clearly was in the position that Fosatu’s leadership took with

⁷⁵ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 5

⁷⁶ Von Holdt, “The Political Significance”, p. 98

⁷⁷ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 59

⁷⁸ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 16

⁷⁹ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 57

⁸⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

regard to the UDF, and the responses that its emergence elicited. Erwin seems to acknowledge this; there is ambivalence in his claim that “there was not... a neglect of the unemployed, but...”⁸¹

Fosatu gave several justifications for their position of non-participation in the UDF, such as a lack of resources, and a critique of the UDF structure and of its links to the ANC. However, the fact that the UDF leadership was supposedly dominated by the “petty bourgeoisie” and middle classes, and its resultant “multi-class” character,⁸² was always cited as decisive – despite the fact that most of these “petty bourgeois” elements were, in fact, not only quite modest in power but also fell into the working class by Fosatu’s *own* definitions. And, in any case, the multi-class character of the UDF was overstated. Firstly, the composition of the membership of the UDF was predominantly working class, even according to a workerist definition. Secondly, its leadership was actually made up predominantly of skilled workers, middle class politicians and the clergy, which in Fosatu’s *own* understanding were only “ideologically” committed to a bourgeois project and could be won over to the side of the workers.⁸³ Thus “contrary to a common view,” rather than being dominated by the “petit bourgeoisie”, civic leaders were “rarely traders and businesspeople”.⁸⁴

Nevertheless even if this had been so, given the Fosatu analyses stated earlier, there would be very little reason for Fosatu to keep its distance. If, as Mayekiso claims, *spaza* owners and petty traders, as a section “working to live”, were considered to be part of the working class, how is it possible that part of Fosatu’s position on the UDF revolved around its “petit bourgeois” leadership? Similarly, if professionals or small business people were only *ideologically* inclined to the bourgeoisie, and could be potential allies, why was this seen to be such an obstacle to participation? (Conversely, many of Fosatu’s leaders came from academia and/or the white “petty bourgeoisie,” and were nonetheless included in the union despite this background).

Clearly part of the reason was simply that the problem of how to relate to other groups and strata had in the context of the early 1980s, according to almost all respondents, simply not

⁸¹ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁸² See HP: AH 2065. D3.1 Summary of the Fosatu CC Meeting, Wilgespruit 15/16 October 1983

⁸³ Swilling, M. 1987. “The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt”. Paper presented to the Wits History Workshop, p.4, available at < http://abahlali.org/files/swilling.udf_.pdf>

⁸⁴ *ibid*

been thought through.⁸⁵ But in another sense, this expresses a fundamental contradiction in the workerist praxis, itself the result of the general failure to formulate an adequate theory of society as a basis on which to operate, and a corresponding programme for action. The roots of the problem, I would argue, lay even deeper. Workerism, being part of the New Left, was permeated by its free-floating pragmatism; it was eclectic and disembedded from a well-formulated set of ideas and corresponding political programme, the result of which was a contradictory set of practices and principles.

6.3.2. The Ruling Class

Because the economic realm was understood as primary, workerism generally conflated power with its economic form. The ruling class comprised those that own the means of production, in line with a Marxist definition. In South Africa's case, this section was dominated by giant monopolies, which due to their important role in the South African economy, which had fundamental "effects... on state policy",⁸⁶ notably in pushing for the introduction of neoliberal reform as part of the 1979 "total strategy".

Despite this Marxist comprehension of the ruling class as comprising capitalists only, the impulse of anti-authoritarianism that sprang up with sections of the New Left and its links to anarchism and syndicalism clearly impacted on workerism here, both directly and indirectly.⁸⁷ While there was no conscious appropriation of syndicalism by Fosatu's leadership, there was some grappling towards a class analysis that moved beyond Marxist economic determinism and reductionism, although this sort of thinking is only embryonic.

This is unsurprising given that the New Left was permeated by thought and organisational forms quite clearly anarchist- or syndicalist- inspired. It is quite plausible therefore to deduce that workerism, being as it was a product of the New Left, was to some extent influenced by elements of actual syndicalism, and in other respects, had independently approximated its features but without doing so in a thorough, coherent and explicit manner. The demonstrable influence of historic syndicalism was both direct – anarchism and syndicalism were part of the New Left; and indirect – syndicalism left an important imprint on the early Gramsci, on

⁸⁵ Hence Phillip Bonner's admission that "we didn't understand the community" (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg)

⁸⁶ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Adrienne Bird [education co-ordinator] report to NEDCOM [National Education Committee] on the Fosatu Labour Studies Course, 18/09/1984

⁸⁷ In fact, it is possible to trace direct lineage between theorists popularised by the New Left and anarchists and syndicalists – including Gramsci, Korsch, E.P Thompson etc. See Ch. 4, esp. 4.2.1

Lukacs, on councillism and other ideas that also influenced the New Left.

Workerism therefore contained “a left strand... a strong sort of syndicalist strand in the sense of a deep mistrust of party politics, and the idea that the trade union is a political expression in itself, of workers’ rights and power”.⁸⁸ However, its engagement with the historic anarchist and syndicalist tradition was limited and fragmented, and arguably, its praxis impoverished by the absence of a systematic engagement with that rich body of ideas and experiences. I speak therefore of this strand of Fosatu workerism as quasi-syndicalist, rather as a truly revolutionary syndicalist, or anarcho-syndicalist. It was similar to revolutionary syndicalism, or anarcho-syndicalism in important respects, but should not be misconstrued as thoroughly revolutionary syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist.

With some exceptions,⁸⁹ anarchists and syndicalists have traditionally understood class power in more than just economic terms, by articulating a definition of class that is centred on the “relations of *domination*, and not just the means of production” which “includes the means of coercion – the capacity to physically enforce decisions, and the means of administration – the instruments that govern society”.⁹⁰ Therefore, in opposition to “a strict Marxist position”, in which “the president of a country must be regarded as a waged worker”,⁹¹ syndicalists understand the state not simply as a superstructural instrument of the ruling class (capital alone), but its controllers as fundamentally a *part* of the ruling class, with a degree of autonomy and power resting upon weapons and bureaucracy.

There is evidence of some nascent thinking along these lines among Fosatu’s workerists. For example, according to Barrett, “if you are talking early ‘80s... I suppose the government at the time was very much seen to be *part and parcel of the ruling class*” (emphasis added).⁹² Sauls also pointed to the importance of power that is not economically derived by questioning the position of managers because they “[have] rights to fire”.⁹³ Fanaroff’s claim

⁸⁸ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg. This affinity has been noted by some studies: for example, Gordon, 1988. A. “The Influence of Syndicalism on the South African Working Class”, Honours Dissertation: University of Essex.

⁸⁹ For example, W.D. Bohm, and W.D. Haywood, (1911), *Industrial Socialism*, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr, as cited in Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 107

⁹⁰ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 109

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg, emphasis added

⁹³ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth, emphasis added.

that “we saw the state as primarily being bound up with the capitalist class”⁹⁴ echoes the anarchist Kropotkin’s formulation that “State... and capitalism are inseparable concepts... bound together by the bond of cause and effect, effect and cause”.⁹⁵

This is at odds with the mainstream of Marxist thought, which prioritises the political struggle for control of the state apparatus, as opposed to rejecting it. (On the contrary, Sauls claimed that state power “was not something to struggle for”.⁹⁶) However, these embryonic attempts to grapple with state power are outweighed by the more traditional Marxist analysis. Thus, the criteria for delineating the ruling class – and this was accepted by all respondents when pushed including those mentioned above – was ownership of the means of *production*. “Real” power, for workerists, was therefore located in the economic realm. The implication of this position, or at least the political strategy enabled by this position (and here it diverges fundamentally from syndicalism), is that the state *could* be made to serve the interests of the working class.⁹⁷

6.3.3. Race and Gender

Fosatu’s theorisation of the historical role of racial and gender oppression in capitalist accumulation in South Africa has already been discussed. The explanation for there having been “so much racism embodied in the state” resided in the fact that “racism isn’t just about a white person didn’t love a black person or a Coloured person”; it exists “protect an interest, and that interest is a capitalist interest”.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁹⁵ cited in Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 109

⁹⁶ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁹⁷ There is also evidence that workerism was influenced by World Systems and Dependency theories – both of which are sometimes called neo-Marxist, although their fidelity to classical Marxism has been widely questioned (famously, in Robert Brenner 1976, “The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism,” *New Left Review*, pp. 25-92). This is not surprising given the popularity of these schools of thought amongst those in the New Left. This understanding was also tied into Fosatu’s rejection of the two-stage theory, because World Systems analyses suggested that seemingly backward features of such as migrant labour, were not semi-feudal or backward (as the CST theory suggested), but resolutely capitalist, and as a result, a capitalist stage was not a necessary step towards socialism. But, in line with Fosatu’s pragmatic approach, “workers were working class, and the capitalists were capitalist class and the points about whether they were comprador or metropole-periphery or whatever was less important”. What was key, however, was that “the formal structure... adopted a concept of class that included all races”. (Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town; see also HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.17.1 March 1985 Advanced Course, section on Trade and Imperialism, p. 3)

⁹⁸ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

This was expressed in low structural wages for certain groups of workers – in South Africa’s case, these were poor black and Afrikaans women, and migrants.⁹⁹ Despite the acceptance of the notion that gender oppression was “the oldest form” of structural subjugation,¹⁰⁰ and a “deep seated form of social organisation” structured around “all sorts of subjective and historic realities”,¹⁰¹ the workerists understood the gender issue “very explicitly as a class issue”.¹⁰² Poor Afrikaans women were pushed off farms, where their families subsidised their wages, and into urban clothing factories as a result of an economic boom and the devastation of Afrikaner society after losing the South African war.¹⁰³ Likewise, factory owners were able to pay black women workers “structural low wages” with the introduction of legislation that restricted urban access to married women on the grounds that “women in town supplemented men’s wages” (the latter being the primary breadwinners).¹⁰⁴ Migrants were similarly forced to accept low wages because their livelihoods were supposedly “subsidised” by their families in the homelands and reserves.

Because workerism understood the central contradiction in society to exist in the labour-capital relation, racial and other non-class oppressions were also understood to function as ideological tools in the control of the ruling class for the purpose of dividing workers. With regards to gender, workerism drew from certain Marxist variants of feminism in understanding the role of women in the economy as analogous to Marx’s “reserve army of labour”; a theory premised on the role of gender oppression in dividing the working class.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the “triple oppression” of women and the genderisation of the workplace (and how this “played into the hands” of the bosses) was clearly understood by women leaders – even those who had no previous theoretical training.¹⁰⁶

Racism, like sexism, was seen to be a (or the) “major political and ideological instrument”¹⁰⁷ for the development of South African capitalism. The workerist tendency therefore proposed a class solution to race and gender oppression – which revolved around uniting the working

⁹⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 “Women Workers”, p. 10; HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Industrial Relations under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet.

¹⁰⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 “Women Workers”

¹⁰¹ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁰² Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰³ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 “Women Workers”, p. 11

¹⁰⁴ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 “Women Workers”, p. 13

¹⁰⁵ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 “Women Workers”, p. 17

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Jane Barrett

¹⁰⁷ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 9

class irrespective of race or gender, because “a strong organised working class is unassailable for capital”.¹⁰⁸ This was the reason for Fosatu’s rejection of the initial racial and migrant provisions proposed by Wiehahn, which it argued compromised working class “unity of organisational and political direction”, without which “a society of equality and justice for all”¹⁰⁹ would be impossible.

Fosatu’s commitment to interracial and inter-gender unity also fuelled Fosatu’s critique of the BC unions and the “multi-racialism” of Tucsa (which comprised parallel and sweetheart unions). Although worker-intellectuals based in the motor unions of the Cape (like Sauls) originally developed an outlook analogous to BC, their contact with Tuacc led them to develop a class-based understanding of society,¹¹⁰ so that Sauls eventually came to agree that the BC outlook of several unionists was a “problem” for the workers struggle.¹¹¹ This emphasis on race was also problematic because in its emphasis on exclusively black leadership, it placed “little emphasis on capital”,¹¹² seeing race, as opposed to class, as the central organising concern.

Fosatu likewise criticised the “multi-racial” character of the UDF, which, according to Zac Yacoob (of the Natal Indian Congress and a leader in the UDF), recognised the distinctive “roots and heritage” of each national group in South Africa, and the fact that each is “maintained in differing conditions of existence by the oppressive or exploitative system”.¹¹³ In light of this situation the UDF envisioned its “task” as being to “heighten the positive features of each national group and to weld these together so that there arises out of this process of organisation a single national consciousness”.¹¹⁴

For workerists, the “problem with this racial way of organising is that the workers of each national group simply become one part of the larger national group”,¹¹⁵ and their interests get subsumed under the interests of the dominant classes within those groups. Rather than attempting to neutralise the different class interests that fractured the national groups in the

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁰⁹ Fosatu. 1983. “Fosatu on Unity” in *South African Labour Bulletin*. Vol. 8, No. 5, p. 68

¹¹⁰ Adler, G.M. 1994. “*The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in it*”: race, class and collective action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986.” PhD Dissertation: Columbia University. pp. 218-222

¹¹¹ *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1980. “Interview with Freddie Sauls”, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 55

¹¹² HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 14

¹¹³ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3 Labour Studies Courses. “Trade Unions and Popular Movements”, p. 20

¹¹⁴ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3 Labour Studies Courses. “Trade Unions and Popular Movements”, p 21

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

pursuit of a national consciousness, as is the approach described above, workerists argued for a class solution to racial and gender oppression precisely because it was seen as fundamentally structured to ensure class interests. That is, rather than seek to merge national groups, regardless of class, into a single nation, workerism favoured uniting the working class of all national groups into a single working class movement.

It should perhaps be mentioned that because Fosatu adopted a “gender undifferentiated approach to organising”¹¹⁶ it initially placed very little special emphasis on tackling the special oppression of women, for which it was criticised.¹¹⁷ However, from about 1982 Fosatu began to take up more decisively the issues surrounding the special oppression of women,¹¹⁸ to “address some of the problems raised”¹¹⁹ by looking at the specific issues facing women workers, like maternity benefits, equal wages, the effects of the pass laws on women,¹²⁰ and the low rates of female participation in education¹²¹ – but from within its class framework.¹²² As a result, “it was agreed at Nedcom [the National Education Committee] that regions should correct this where possible, and that seminars on ‘women workers’ should be held in each region”¹²³ thereby beginning to address “the enormous need for education around the role of women in society”.¹²⁴ Thus, in its booklet on “Women Workers”, Fosatu argued,

Some people say that to talk about women workers as a separate group seems dangerous... this seems true. And more than that, it seems to be strategically important. Employers and the government are always trying to divide the workers - why do we seem to be doing the same thing? The answer is simple: men and women are already divided. Ignoring the divisions that do exist will not make them go away.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mama Lydia Ngwenya. 1983. “Women and Unions” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 6., p. 66

¹¹⁸ Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹¹⁹ *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1983. “Workshop on Women”, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 17

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Adrienne Bird [Education Co-ordinator] report to NEDCOM on the Fosatu Labour Studies Course, 18/09/1984, p. 2

¹²² Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ Fosatu cited in *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1983. “Workshop on Women”, in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 17

¹²⁵ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.11. Women Workers. March 1984, p. 1

6.4. The State and Law

At a basic level there is nothing particularly notable about the workerist theory of the state. Again, most respondents reported that in-depth theoretical debates were not something that took up a great amount of time amongst workerists.¹²⁶ Therefore workerists claimed to have understood the state in Marxist terms, as “the support for the capitalist class”,¹²⁷ despite the fact that it is “not outwardly controlled by capitalists or employers”.¹²⁸ As such, workerism often operated within a basic Marxist framework, in which the state is understood to be the means by one class oppresses the other, or an “organ”¹²⁹ and “expression”¹³⁰ of class domination. As such it was seen to be both “backed by class power” and “reflect[ing] the balance of class forces”.¹³¹ Most respondents agreed that although not neutral, the state could be made to serve the working class and that “what was needed was a workers’ state”.¹³² However, “what form that workers state would take wasn’t really defined”.¹³³

Through an analysis of their practice, however, it is clear that Fosatu’s leadership did *not* understand the state in instrumental terms. In fact, according to Bonner, part of Fosatu’s decision to register was derived from “a less functionalist approach to government institutions”,¹³⁴ and Fosatu’s leadership understood there to be “a variety of pressures from both labour and capital as well as in the branches of government itself”, which “were working to undermine that resolve” of the state.¹³⁵

As such, both the state and individual pieces of legislation (like those enshrined by the Wiehahn labour reforms) were seen as inherently contradictory, and thus liable to yielding fundamental concessions if correctly exploited. This is clearly indicative of a view of the state and capital in far less monolithic terms than more orthodox Marxists would see it. It is also indicative of a view that understands the power of organised workers to affect real change – legislatively or otherwise. Thus Webster and Bonner argued, “these unions have

¹²⁶ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

¹²⁷ *ibid*

¹²⁸ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 Industrial Relations Under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet, pg. 23

¹²⁹ *ibid*

¹³⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July, 2009, Cape Town

¹³¹ *ibid*

¹³² Barrett, *op. cit*

¹³³ Barrett, *op. cit.*; Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹³⁴ Bonner, “The Independent Trade Unions”, p. 24

¹³⁵ *ibid*

fostered a sense of working class power which has presented the South African state with a serious problem”.¹³⁶

This sort of thinking was evident in most interviews. Adler, for example, argued that “the state is the agent of capital” but continued by saying “having said that... and even within capital itself, one took a view that said that there is relative autonomy operating; there are layers within the organisations, you work with those who you think you can get something out of”.¹³⁷ Similarly, for Fanaroff the state was “autonomous to some extent”; something that “always fascinated us about the apartheid state” because “it was never a classic totalitarian state; it had very totalitarian aspects to it, but it was bound up by the remnants of the rule of law and it was never clear to us what the limits were”.¹³⁸ This is why, according to Fanaroff, the workerists “were quite good at exploiting it”.¹³⁹ Mayekiso also described the state as operating with a degree of autonomy, which is why “you would get capitalists sometimes not happy with the way in which they [the state] are doing things”.¹⁴⁰

This view of the state echoes that accepted by the Poulantzian School in the sense that the state and law are seen as being sites of contestation – both between capital and labour, but also different fractions of capital. For Poulantzas, the state should not be understood as an instrumental object, but rather “the material condensation of the relation of forces between social classes”.¹⁴¹ Clearly this paralleled the claim made by several respondents in which the state is described as the “expression” of the balance of class forces. Erwin admits that the underlying theoretical foundation for this sort of thinking, in the context of what was popular at the time, *was* inspired by structuralist Marxism – of which Poulantzas (like Althusser) was a key exponent.

However, there also seems to be evidence that this view derives in some part from Gramscian theory in which the state assists in the maintenance of class rule not simply by coercion but by legitimacy. So, while workerists “read some of the Eurocommunists and we got very big

¹³⁶ Webster and Bonner. 1979. “Background” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 6

¹³⁷ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹³⁸ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹³⁹ *ibid*

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁴¹ Weber, H. 1977. “The State and the Transition to Socialism: Interview with Nicos Poulantzas” in *Critique Communiste*. June edn., No. 16, p. 3

into Poulantzas and Althusser”,¹⁴² clearly this was supplemented by various other “neo-Marxists” of which Gramsci (or at least a particular reading of Gramsci) was “probably the most influential”.¹⁴³

These two theories are not incompatible. Both Poulantzas and Gramsci attempted to develop what they saw as a more nuanced Marxist conception of the state that surpassed simple instrumentalist formulations of the state as simply armed terror against the proletariat. In fact, it was by drawing from Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (i.e. the power of ideas) that Poulantzas evolved the view that the state has relative autonomy, since it must ensure the stability of class domination not simply by coercion but by consent, usually by co-opting a fraction of the working class so that it identified *de facto* with its oppressor. Furthermore, for Poulantzas, the state was constantly under pressure to ensure stability of the capitalist system in the face of contending “fractions” of capital – which nonetheless had diverging interests that must be reconciled. As such, for Poulantzas, the state is not a “monolithic bloc” that the masses will have to confront from without; the state itself was seen as being riddled with considerable contradictions and its “institutions ... themselves arenas of class conflict”.¹⁴⁴

Wolpe applied a similar analysis to South Africa. Like Poulantzas, this broke from the traditional instrumentalist Marxist mould that sees state as acting instrumental to capital by developing an analysis in which the state is understood to be functional in terms of regulating the system of capitalism (as through apartheid) – and even in some cases to the detriment of individual capitalists. Implicit in this theory is a conception of the state as having a degree of autonomy which enables it to enact laws and institute mechanisms that are not in the interests of some sections of capital, and not even in the interests, perhaps, of capitalism as a *whole*.

¹⁴² Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg. Also mentioned in interviews with Webster, Adler, Copelyn and Bonner.

¹⁴³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; also in Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁴⁴ Poulantzas cited in Weber, “The State”, p. 3. Part of these internal contradictions in the state would be ideological in nature. For this, Poulantzas could draw from Althusser’s notion of “Ideological State Apparatuses”, according to which “a vast number of institutions involved in one way or another in the dissemination of ideology are not only ‘ideological apparatuses’, but state ideological apparatuses’ [ISA], which must be distinguished from the ‘Repressive State Apparatus’”. (See Milliband, R. 2003. *Marxism and Politics*, Merlin Press: United States, p. 54). This concept parallels Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony”, although the former shifts the focus of ideological production to the state. Importantly, like with “hegemony”, the theory of ISA maintains that the institutions of the state that control ideological production can be *occupied* and used by other classes – hence the fact that Gramsci could work in the justification of Eurocommunist strategies, which deny the need for revolutionary (or insurrectionary) overthrow.

Seemingly accepting this, Erwin claimed in the mid-1980s, “The bourgeoisie” (and particularly the multinational sections) “are seeing the crude racism of apartheid as inimical to their interests, particularly on the international front, and are openly supporting government reform based on class interests”.¹⁴⁵

This notion was central to Fosatu’s position on the nature and role of the state, and had important strategic and tactical implications (the decision to register, to go into industrial councils and the willingness of Fosatu to use labour courts, and so on) that will be explored more in subsequent sections.

It is also something that separates workerism from the dominant conceptions held by Sactu/ANC/SACP because it “implies a different conception of the state”.¹⁴⁶ The ANC and SACP, as well as Sactu, for many years insisted that the apartheid state was monolithic and actually “fascist”,¹⁴⁷ a position that not only justified for years a narrow focus on armed struggle, but also led to an initial dismissal of the new trade unions as fake, as tools of apartheid etc.¹⁴⁸ because it ruled out *in advance* “the possibility of genuine and open trade unionism”.¹⁴⁹

So, for a long time Sactu and the ANC viewed Tuacc and Fosatu with deep distrust because they saw “apartheid and the manufacturing interests” as “absolutely aligned, and in that context, a trade union is an impossible thing [sic] to happen”.¹⁵⁰ Thus “they went underground into military struggle” justifying this by reference to the so-called “police state”, which “allowed them to both attack the trade union movement as it emerged, and undermine it”.¹⁵¹ Obviously, if union work was impossible, there was no point in organising unions; at most, the remnants of Sactu should be used to recruit guerrillas to the ANC/SACP armed wing. (Again, this gives the lie to claims that present the new unions of the 1970s as basically Sactu or underground ANC initiatives).¹⁵² Because of this, Wiehahn’s liberalising rhetoric was

¹⁴⁵ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 61

¹⁴⁶ Fine, De Clerq and Innes, “In Search of Concessions”, p. 41

¹⁴⁷ Lewis, J. 1985. “Review: *POWER! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 120

¹⁴⁸ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, “Review”, p. 120

¹⁵⁰ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

¹⁵² See Sithole, J. and Ndlovu, S. 2006 “The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980” and the sharp critique by Legassick, 2008. “Debating the revival of the workers’ movement in the 1970s”. For a partial response, see Sithole, J. 2009. “Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?”

perceived by these groups as “a fiction behind which lies the harsh reality of the extended domination of the apartheid state”.¹⁵³ (Meanwhile Tucsa claimed the legislation showed the state had “finally come to its senses”¹⁵⁴ by amending the Industrial Conciliation Act, and so, had essentially understood the state as a “neutral arbiter”¹⁵⁵ mediating between contending forces.)

The “registration debate” is particularly interesting in this sense, because it highlights the different ways that the state was theorised by the various parties. By analysing Fosatu’s position, Fine, De Clerq and Innes (in an academic debate published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* in 1981) come to the conclusion that Fosatu understood the state as follows: “not as a neutral arbiter between contending groups, more than *merely* a repressive instrument of one class, but rather as a repressive force which is located in a nexus of contradictory social relations and whose character is determined by the changing relations between the classes involved”.¹⁵⁶ Thus, “the apartheid state, like any capitalist state” was “not a monolithic entity and purely functional instrument of capital, but a force which workers can affect by their struggles and one that is itself torn by the contradictions of the labour-capital relation”.¹⁵⁷

The justification for this definition is the following: while provisionally applying for registration, but protesting against state interference, Fosatu obviously recognised the state’s repressive nature. Yet it maintained a broad class understanding of non-neutrality because it recognised registration as a *concession* that was forced on the state. Thus it also went beyond Marxist instrumentalism by recognising that under pressure, real concessions can be won, suggesting a more contradictory relationship between the state and capital.¹⁵⁸ Thus the question of whether to register was seen by the workerists as a tactical question only (not “as

¹⁵³ GWU in Fine, De Clerq and Innes, “In Search of Concessions”. The idea of the anti-registration position as being “boycottist” was criticised by the workerists. Bonner defines the “boycottist position” as “boycotting all government created institutions until all unjust laws have been removed” (See Bonner, “The Independent Unions”, p. 21)

¹⁵⁴ Fine, De Klerk and Innes, “In Search of Concessions”, p. 41

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*

¹⁵⁷ Fine, B. 1982. “Trade Unions and the State once more: a Reply to our Critics” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No.1, p. 55

¹⁵⁸ Hence Bonner’s reference to the “*apparent* monolith of the state” (Bonner, “The independent unions” p. 21.)

an end in itself”¹⁵⁹), holding out the possibility for the expansion of “political space within which [Fosatu’s] membership can grow and strengthen itself”.¹⁶⁰

For Innes, Fosatu saw the state “as a repressive force which does not seek only to secure its ends through coercion, but also, under intense pressure, may seek to rule through a combination of coercion and concession”.¹⁶¹ Innes adds that “in such circumstances... dominated classes and groups may well be able to... turn them [concessions] to their advantage, exploiting the contradiction in which the state is trapped,¹⁶² thereby “transform[ing] the character of these official institutions” (emphasis mine).¹⁶³ Again, there is a lot in common here with Poulantzas’ claim that state institutions are “arenas of class conflict” that can be exploited by the working class (and of course, non-monopoly capital) for its own ends.

Fosatu’s workerists held that because the state tended to act in the interests of capitalism as a whole and *reflected* the balance of class forces, faced with rising black militancy it would be forced to alienate sections of capital (by, for example, by offering legal status to black unions), thereby creating contradictions that could be further exploited by the working class to pursue its own project. Therefore, whether located within a Poulantzian framework or not, based on the responses of my interviewees, Fine et al captured the workerist position rather well.¹⁶⁴

Fosatu *was*, as Fine et al argue, keenly aware of the repressiveness of the apartheid state, which was not necessarily a “reflection of fear, but just a reflection of actuality”.¹⁶⁵ This was unfairly construed by Sactu as evidence that Fosatu was a “yellow” business union, narrowly concerned with wages and working conditions, and probably at the service of apartheid. Fosatu was, on the contrary, explicit about its political character, claiming that “Trade union organisation is deeply political – it is about working people winning back control over their

¹⁵⁹ Fosatu. 1980. “Tuacc Central Committee Statement on the Amended Industrial Conciliation Act that forms the basis on the Joint Stand with other Unions” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6&7, p. 14

¹⁶⁰ Innes. 1982. “Trade Unions and the Challenge to State Power” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 64

¹⁶¹ Innes. 1982. “Trade Unions and”, p. 41

¹⁶² Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 62

¹⁶³ *ibid*

¹⁶⁴ Fine et al, “In Search”, p. 41

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg. Of course this was not the sole reason for Fosatu’s policy of alignment to political parties, but this will be discussed in chapter 8.

lives”.¹⁶⁶ It insisted that its policy of non-affiliation to political parties had been “completely misconstrued”.¹⁶⁷ Fosatu also clearly understood the class bias of the state; this is evident in its attempts to “to push employers to push *their* government”.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Fosatu did not see the state and its institutions as impenetrable or monolithic entities, unwaveringly instrumental to capital – the quotes cited earlier are evidence of this.

Workerism, as Fine et al suspected, was premised on the notion that the “character” of the “official institutions” of the state¹⁶⁹ could be transformed. This meant that its apparatuses and structures (like Industrial Councils for example) could be appropriated for strategic interest: “it is misleading to talk of this system [of industrial councils] as being uniform and monolithic in nature”.¹⁷⁰ And, for Sauls, “what irritates us is that people say that those guys have just been swallowed by the system... but we have seen how we can best use all opportunities”.¹⁷¹ Lastly, it is clear that the workerists understood the state as operating in a “nexus of contradictory social relations”, or an “expression of class power”,¹⁷² the character of which is “determined by the changing relations between the classes involved”.¹⁷³

Fine et al’s article (on Fosatu’s conception of the state) was criticised in a subsequent edition by Fink Haysom (an attorney and researcher at the Wits Centre for Applied Legal Studies, banned in 1982)¹⁷⁴ as “inadequate” because it “ignores the form of the state”.¹⁷⁵ For Haysom the state is a hierarchical institution “resting on certain features of capitalist society”.¹⁷⁶ This means that under certain circumstances, “trade unions can be pushed into organisational relations which, though apparently “fair”, undermine their organisational strength”.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁶ See HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.3 Industrial Relations Under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet. p. 28

¹⁶⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.3, Agenda for 1981 Central Committee Meeting, pg. 3

¹⁶⁸ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Handwritten notes about the Fosatu Labour Studies Course 1984, p. 2, emphasis original

¹⁶⁹ Innes, “Trade Unions”, p. 67

¹⁷⁰ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1981. “Critique of the Act”, Vol. 7, No. 1&2, p. 33 (The editors of the *South African Labour Bulletin* at this point included key Tuacc and Fosatu workerists such as Webster, Bonner and Halton Cheadle.)

¹⁷¹ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1980 “Interview with Freddie Sauls: Secretary of Numarwosa”, Vol. 6, No. 2&3, p. 58

¹⁷² Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁷³ Fine et al, “In Search”, p. 41; Erwin, *op. cit*

¹⁷⁴ *Wits Student*. 1982. “Amnesty International demands unbanning”, Vol. 34, No. 18

¹⁷⁵ Haysom, “In Search”, p. 43. See Hirsch and Nicol, “Trade Unions” for a similar critique.

¹⁷⁶ Webster. 1983. “Mawu and the Industrial Council – a comment” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 5, p. 18

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*

In fact, it seems as if Fosatu was aware of this. Webster admitted, “The NIC [National Industrial Council] agreement is a complex technical document that will force Mawu to undertake some division of labour inside the organisation. In particular some members will have to acquire technical knowledge and negotiating skills”.¹⁷⁸ However, given that “Fosatu’s training...” and thus workerism, “...was *par excellence* the art of the possible”,¹⁷⁹ rather than approach the question of participation in such structures as a matter of principle, Fosatu treated them merely as *tactical* problems that could be avoided by taking measures to mitigate this outcome. Fosatu’s response was that it would not rely *only* on the ICs.¹⁸⁰ The leadership thus argued that bureaucratic tendencies could be “counter-balanced” by strong workplace organisation and the building of “representative structures which can be made accountable in a real way to the rank and file”.¹⁸¹ Thus direct democracy could be retained despite the fact that these structures were designed precisely in order to erode worker control. Fosatu therefore evolved a strategy that involved hiring a hall within the vicinity of the Industrial Council talks and bussing in shop stewards to authorise decisions:

So once you get Industrial Councils, the best you can do is to ship in a hundred shop stewards and to authorise, mandate, ratify. Now that was quite an impressive handling of the situation, but the fact is, you have to change. So once you could... the question of power made you change.¹⁸²

Not all Fosatu leaders agreed. Rather than seeing the new laws around registration as a concession forced on the state from without, reflecting a shift in the balance of forces, Mashishi held that:

Any labour law is not meant for labour. It’s meant for business [and to] to make sure of the stability of industry... it also *reduces the power of the workers*, because if there’s no labour law and workers can do what they want, and they are more powerful than the employers (emphasis mine).¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Webster. 1983. “Mawu and the Industrial Council – a comment” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 5, p. 18

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁸⁰ TULEC. 8 a2: Fosatu. Mawu and the Industrial Council. Fosatu Education Series Booklet, p. 11

¹⁸¹ Webster, “Mawu and the IC”, p. 18

¹⁸² Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁸³ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg. Emphasis added

Was this really a contradiction? At one level Fosatu's other workerists would probably not have disagreed. The possibility that the Industrial Conciliation Act Amendment was a concession does not necessarily mean that the concession was not simultaneously *intended* to control labour. Fosatu in fact stated clearly that the legislation was designed specifically for this purpose and constituted "a highly sophisticated exercise in industrial relations engineering, designed to win approval from overseas and to neutralise African trade union organisation".¹⁸⁴ However, the workers themselves were the makers of their new labour situation – given that it was they who forced this concession from the state – and the new legislation opened new opportunities that could subvert the intentions of the law. From this position, boycottism seems most logical – which brings Mashishi's workerism into question.

The other workerists in Fosatu's leadership clearly saw registration not simply as something that would "reduce the power of the workers". They saw it as a possible avenue for the achievement of exactly the opposite: "a real shift in the power relationship between black unions, the government and employers".¹⁸⁵ Yet, again, there still seems to be a real inconsistency in Fosatu's praxis here. In a conflicting statement, Fosatu advises workers on the irrelevance of legal reforms, and not to "WAIT FOR REGISTRATION" but rather to "ORGANISE FOR RECOGNITION because nowhere in the history of the workers' struggle has any change of law led to the recognition of worker strength" (emphasis original).¹⁸⁶

One wonders why, if this was accepted as generally true, workerism placed so much emphasis on extending the legal space in which to work. This contradictory praxis was probably the result of the lack of a clear theoretical and analytic framework and programme to guide action, with its roots in the scepticism toward theory displayed by most in the New Left. It was therefore, arguably, a fundamental stumbling block of both the New Left and workerism, as Jane Barrett herself suggests:

... even then, outside [Fosatu structures], there wasn't a great deal [of political discussion]... to be honest I think that it's a huge weakness of the whole movement historically, that there's been a lack of [reading and discussion] and I'm not just talking about the lay movement.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Bonner, "The Independent Trade Unions", p. 20

¹⁸⁵ Tuacc (Tvl). 1981. "Registration" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 8, p. 6

¹⁸⁶ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.1. *Fosatu Worker News*, Feb 1980, 3rd Edn

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

6.5. Democracy, Anti-Vanguardism and “Trade Union Consciousness”

A commitment to democracy – of a sort that goes far deeper than common formalistic and representative notions convey – is core to workerism. This central principle was not only a distinctive organisational principle of Fosatu, and before it the Tuacc; it struck at the very heart of the relationship of the workerists to the New Left, was central to its separation from orthodox Marxism-Leninism and the SACP, and manifested in a variety of debates and strategic-tactical decisions.

Fosatu’s self-defining antagonistic relationship to the SACP was premised on a fundamental rejection of its authoritarian character, as well as its close relationship to the dictatorial Soviet regime. Of course, this brought it into close proximity to the New Left, which, in all its forms, consciously sought to distance itself from the Soviet Union. According to Webster “we were very clear that socialism means nothing if it wasn’t democratic” which was informed by “a rejection of the Soviet model”¹⁸⁸ – that is, the model to which it was believed the SACP dogmatically adhered. The Soviet model was built not only on the “democratic centralist” organisational and decision-making structure (which was rejected by the workerists in favour of a bottom-up approach), but also on the primacy of the Vanguard Party in struggle. Marx and Engels, like Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, were convinced of the basic limitations of trade unions as agents of really revolutionary change:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation etc.¹⁸⁹

The SACP was no different in this regard. An article entitled “A Trade Union is not a Political Party” published in its theoretical journal the *African Communist*, reiterated: “Our accumulated experience tells us that the trade unions alone, the workers’ struggle alone will not of itself, pass beyond the limits of economic struggle against the employers”.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁸⁹ Lenin, VI. [1902] 1961, “What is to Be Done? Burning questions of our movement” in *Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1*. Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, p. 17-18, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>>

¹⁹⁰ Tousaint.1983. “A Trade Union is not a Political Party” in *African Communist*, No. 93, p. 44

Therefore, according to the author, “To pass beyond that limit there is need for clear socialist theory,” and thus a political party; “a detachment armed with and advanced theory and with a dedication and discipline which will enable it to impart discipline to the class”.¹⁹¹

Although workerism was ambivalent about the need for political parties (see Ch. 8, esp. 8.4.6), it certainly did reject the Leninist vanguardist model. Theoretically it was premised on a rejection of the orthodox Marxist view that trade unions are prone to sectionalism and reformism and can at best develop a “trade union consciousness”. Copelyn, for example, criticised the SACP position: “If one assumes that the party has a monopoly of political wisdom and correctness, such disagreements [between the party and the unions] either cannot arise, or would constitute a ‘false consciousness’ on the part of the trade unions”.¹⁹² Workerism was thus ultimately premised on a rejection of Marxist vanguardism. It is worth noting that this was also a break with some of Gramsci’s later work: Gramsci was pessimistic regarding trade unions, and stressed the necessity of a vanguard party (which he dubbed “the modern Prince,” after Machiavelli). This flexible and eclectic approach was itself rather characteristic of the New Left more generally.

One of the biggest debates in the IAS (although it involved others outside the organisation too) in the 1970s revolved around whether to organise or to educate first. Although it may seem a simple strategic question, “underneath there were hidden quite of lot of other things” that related to “what the role of students would be in the organisation”.¹⁹³ Fanaroff describes the conflict as being the cause of a “rancorous and damaging split”, with one side arguing that “you couldn’t just organise workers into unions because they would then become reformist, because that’s the nature of unions”, and that “the only way you can avoid that is by educating the workers first”.¹⁹⁴ According to Adler:

...the underlying assumption there was that you needed to kind of create this vanguard, elite party group or grouping of people who would be properly educated, and you could move into political action that way, as opposed to working in a trade union.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ *ibid*

¹⁹² Copelyn, J. 1991. “Preparing Ourselves for Permanent Independence” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 8, p. 58

¹⁹³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

This debate was intersected by another debate – the industrial versus general unionism debate – in which the “rival poles”¹⁹⁶ were the Tuacc leadership in Durban on the one hand (in favour of industrial unions and joined by a sympathetic section of the IAS in Johannesburg that gravitated towards the Tuacc position), and Cape Town on the other (tending towards general unionism). This debate highlighted a variety of important ideological positions about Tuacc and IAS workerists, the first of which revolved around the core belief that industrial unions, particularly in the South African context, where industries are dominated by giant multinationals and local conglomerates, had the potential to better challenge capitalism than those organised on a looser general basis. But more importantly, it signalled the rejection of the thesis that industrial trade unions (or unions of any sort for that matter) are in all cases limited by their tendency towards sectionalism, and the development of a similar sectional consciousness. Industrial unionism addresses sectionalism, rather than reinforced it:

...in Cape Town there was a Marxist group in the [Western Province] Workers Advice Bureau, who really was saying...well they weren't just saying that general unions prevent the sectional tendencies of industrial unions. They were saying that industrial unions are inherently reformist – in fact any kind of union was going to be reformist so you need a different kind of grouping to ensure a revolutionary praxis, which I thought then was unreal. In fact I still think its unreal.¹⁹⁷

Instead Tuacc's leadership (and later Fosatu's), while recognising the dangers of sectionalism, argued that tendencies towards sectionalism could be overcome.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, workerism, in seeing the trade union as *the* vehicle for the creation of a working class identity and indeed socialist consciousness, perceived “knowledge... as arising out of collective experience, to be used and shared by other workers”.¹⁹⁹ For them this was brought to the workers through struggle and internal education, and not from without by a revolutionary vanguard armed with the scientific theory. This fundamentally challenges some central premises of orthodox Marxism, and connects workerism fundamentally with anarchism and syndicalism.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹⁹ Cooper, L. 1998. “From “Rolling Mass Action” to “RPL”: the changing discourse of experience and learning in the South African labour movement” in *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2

Workerism thus separated itself from both the SACP/Sactu and the Trotskyite groups, and linked itself explicitly to New Left eclecticism, openness and experimentation (“the art of the possible”). Rather than accepting pre-determined Marxist-Leninist “dogma” or “ideology”, as Sactu and the SACP did, workerists were undeterred by the limitations that were theoretically prescribed for their praxis. Like the New Left, therefore, Fosatu’s workerists preferred to use Marx’s analytical tools while formulating their own theory where it was required by the exigencies of struggle.

This challenges the picture painted by Baskin, for example, that workerists were all either Trotskyite “revolutionary socialists” who saw the unions as a stepping-stone to the party, or “economists/syndicalists” focusing their struggle narrowly on workplace issues. Rather, evidence runs counter to such a dichotomy: workerism was neither vanguardist, nor narrowly focussed on the trade union and workplace struggles.

This aspect excludes those who were not willing to challenge orthodoxy, in this case Marxist-Leninist assumptions about the nature of trade unions. The workerists in the IAS (that were absorbed into Fosatu) developed the position that if workers “don’t trust you and they don’t see that the organisation breeds benefits to them, they don’t trust your politics either”,²⁰⁰ which suggested that consciousness came through struggle and not from without. The debate in the IAS was polarised between “Steve Friedman and all the students on the one side and Phil and Gavin Anderson and myself and a guy called Sipho Kubeka and various others... [including] Sheldon [Leader], on the other side”.²⁰¹ The former group, arguing for educational (as opposed to union) work and general unionism, I would argue, cannot be considered to be workerists.

But it was not simply on the question of the vanguard party that workerism retained a deep commitment to democracy and to the self-activity of the working class. The worker control tradition described by Ulrich was an integral part of Fosatu’s praxis.²⁰² It was one of the most important features of the federation, distinguishing it (and workerism) from other contemporary, and subsequent, traditions, including the Sactu tradition, which became increasingly militarised and directly subordinate to the ANC/SACP (See Ch. 8, esp. 8.4.1).

²⁰⁰ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

²⁰¹ *ibid*

²⁰² Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

6.6. “Politics” and “Economics”: beyond the “economism” caricature

One affinity that Nash sees between Turner and Fosatu was a stress on identity, where politics was understood as “the realisation of identity”.²⁰³ Using Foster’s speech for the 1982 Congress as a point of reference, Nash outlines the way in which this conception of politics – now tied to *class* identity – was fundamentally accepted by Fosatu’s workerists. For example, Foster maintained that the power of the working class as it stood was “only a potential power because since it has no definite social identity of itself as a class”.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, according to Foster, a concern with clarifying social identities was “the very essence of politics”,²⁰⁵ a position that predisposed Fosatu, in response to charges of economism, to denigrate its critics as having “a very narrow, formalistic notion of what politics is”.²⁰⁶

This concern with the creation of working class identity is, as Nash suggests, central to the New Left, which stressed agency, conscious self-activity and the construction of a socialist consciousness – although different currents did so in different ways. In contradiction to this, Marx and the Soviet leaders tended to downplay the voluntaristic possibilities for revolutionary activity, seeing the development of a working class identity as an inevitable outcome of the deterministic and teleological development of the forces of production, and by the efforts of a revolutionary vanguard party – the existence of which is itself a product of material conditions.

There are exceptions. Critical or dissident Marxist currents continually stressed the more humanistic, less deterministic elements of Marx’s thought – but they remained on the fringes of the Marxist movement throughout the 20th Century. The dominant Marxist tradition of the 19th Century was that of the Labour and Socialist (“Second”) international, and of the 20th Century, Communism and its Trotskyite offshoot. However, the small critical, dissident Marxist current cannot be taken as the “true” Marxist current, simply because most Marxists did (and still do) reject their approach. That is, determinism, vanguardism and so on were the historically dominant theory and praxis of Marxism. Although they were not the only

²⁰³ Nash, “the Moment”, p. 70

²⁰⁴ Foster cited in Nash, “The Moment of”, p. 70

²⁰⁵ *ibid*

²⁰⁶ *ibid*

currents in Marxism, but they were certainly pre-eminent.²⁰⁷ This can easily be judged by a comparison of the size and impact of, say the council communist movement and the Communist Parties. With the New Left (and the popularisation of Western Marxism), the importance of ideas, ideology, culture and consciousness (and the importance of self-activity of the masses in mass formations) came to be taken more seriously by the Marxist mainstream, but even then, vanguardist views retained a significant purchase through Maoism, Castroism and Trotskyism.

While Nash is correct to stress identity, workerism broke with Sartrean thinking in stressing *material* concerns arising from patterns of ownership and control in a capitalist economy, and saw activity challenging these as inherently political.²⁰⁸ For example, Foster claimed, “our whole existence is political and we welcome that” because “our concern is with the very essence of politics and that is the relation between the major classes in South Africa being capital and labour”.²⁰⁹ Understanding politics in terms of identity construction, and in terms of prioritising class relations, are not mutually exclusive. The relation between capital and labour, as understood by workerism, was itself partly an ideological relation. Similarly, both aspects of class domination – that is economic and ideological – were the products of the authoritarian power relations inherent in capitalism. Thus for Fosatu “politics” necessarily have involved a subversion of the class relation: “Trade union organisation is deeply political. It is about working people winning back control over their own lives”.²¹⁰

This notion of ideological struggle – including over identity – as the essence of politics is expressed by Sauls:

Authority is not there because it has power, but because you allow it to have power. And for us basically to politicise a movement is basically to say, look you have the power... But you cannot challenge it unless you have a clear consciousness and understanding of why the power is there.²¹¹

207

Van der Walt, L. 2010. “Counterpower, participatory democracy, revolutionary defence: debating *Black Flame*, revolutionary anarchism and historical Marxism” in *International Socialism*, Issue 130. Available at < <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=729>>

²⁰⁸ TULEC. Salha c2: Fosatu. *Rand Daily Mail*. In *Fosatu Press Digest*. “Unions set to oppose labour party”, 2nd February 2003.

²⁰⁹ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 36

²¹⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 Industrial Relations under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet. p. 28

²¹¹ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

If this perception of politics articulated by Fosatu is recognised, many of the accusations of economism levelled at the federation would not stand, given that “authority” cuts across the economic, political and ideological realms.

While Fosatu’s strategy was infused with a deep commitment to the ideological liberation of the workers, and the construction of a specifically *working class* identity and culture that transcends hegemonic bourgeois values, this was necessarily supplemented by a commitment to challenging existing material power relations (discussed more under strategy). Thus if Fosatu’s commitments to political education and identity construction revolved around transforming the relations concerning control of means of cultural production, its commitment to economic upliftment constituted a challenge to patterns of economic power.

This understanding of politics was largely responsible for Fosatu’s policy of independence. Fosatu saw its own role as being sufficiently political: Fosatu’s autonomous stance “should not be interpreted to mean that we not participate in politics” because “it is impossible in organising Black workers not to be involved in what are basically political issues”.²¹² Rather, it was Fosatu *policy* to “comment on, advance or oppose any policy of any authority or institution affecting worker interests generally and the interests of the labour movements in particular”.²¹³

If Sactu’s decline was seen as evidence of how party politics could override *union* politics, other examples could be noted that showed that unions could be radically political *without* political parties’ leadership (the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour, or CNT, of Spain, which played a key role in workplace and land takeovers in the Spanish Revolution of 1936-1939 was noted by several respondents, and is a good example).²¹⁴

Unlike many “political” (state) socialists (who should be contrasted with libertarian and anti-statist socialists and who ironically castigated Fosatu for its “apolitical” position) workerists understood relationship between politics and economics as intimately connected. Bonner

²¹² HP: AH 1999. C1.6 “Fosatu: its policies and objectives”, August 1980, p. 3.

²¹³ See HP: AH 1999, C1.8. Fosatu Constitution (as amended at the second national congress in April 1982), p. 3.

²¹⁴ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town; Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town.

explicitly warned against the dangers of separating “economics” and “politics”, explaining that “there is often a false dichotomy drawn between politics and economics in which politics is confined to actions directed towards the state”.²¹⁵ For Bonner, even a traditionally economic demand like “the living wage demand is a politically charged issue, since it potentially involves overturning the privileged position of the white working class and the low wage economy as a whole”.²¹⁶

Thus Fosatu sought to *reconcile* the political and economic - *unlike* its critics, who tended to sharply distinguish “economics” from “politics” and then treat the “political” as necessarily primary. Given that these groups also argued that “politics” was not something unions naturally did, this priority of “politics” implied the priority of the party. The attitude to trade unions contained in this view therefore precludes their political potential, and in fact, refuses to acknowledge their political historical role (*even* in the formalistic sense concerning government of society). Paradoxically, it was precisely those subscribing to the above position who castigated Fosatu for its supposed “separation of economic and politics”.²¹⁷

However, again a tension in Fosatu’s praxis can be discerned. Despite the claim that trade union activity was itself political, a central part of Fosatu’s strategy revolved around, ironically, *not* getting involved in overt “political struggle”. Likewise, its work revolved far less around patterns of power *outside* the workplace than the above statements might suggest. In part fifteen of a series entitled, “The Making of the Working Class” published in *Fosatu Worker News* Bonner criticised Sactu for “immediately committing itself to political struggle”, and going “further than other trade unions before it who had taken up political issues” by entering a formal alliance with the ANC.²¹⁸

Precisely what constitutes “political struggle” was not comprehensively defined, but clearly it was suggesting that overt identification with political parties and formal alliances with political parties were a serious problem. However, it also seemingly referred to issues taken up by Sactu in the 1950s such as “political” struggles for “the right of movement, the right of

²¹⁵ Bonner, “The Independent Unions”, p. 35

²¹⁶ *ibid*

²¹⁷ See Sactu cited in Lambert, R. 1983. “Sactu and the IC Act” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 29

²¹⁸ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.2. “The Making of the Working Class: Sactu and the Congress Alliance” in *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, No. 42, p. 4

domicile” and “lack of political representation”²¹⁹ as well as “political issues” like “stay-away campaigns”.²²⁰

Because of this, Fosatu concentrated on issues relevant to building a strong, well-organised and democratic union movement (despite its own participation in “political campaigns” directly affecting workers like the campaign against the tricameral parliament). It did so by focussing primarily on issues directly affecting its membership on the shop floor, such as the economic (or rather “indirectly political”) issues of wages, working conditions, and racial discrimination, and on the more directly (in the workerist definition) political issues of worker education, solidarity and unity.

How can this tension be resolved? The workerist reluctance to get too involved in “political issues” was a *tactical* choice derived from Fosatu’s assessment of the apartheid state and its harsh and repressive treatment of political groups and overtly political unionism, given the banning of the ANC, PAC and SACP and the crushing of Sactu in the 1960s. The workerists were keenly aware of their fragile legal status, which was premised on their “economic” nature as a trade union in the eyes of the state. Thus workerism entailed an attempt to play up this aspect of their praxis, not an uncommon action in tense political environments.²²¹

So, the federation considered itself political but focussed its politics on a narrower, carefully chosen, set of issues. This created the impression, for even sympathetic writers, to see in Fosatu a tendency “to identify independence from petit bourgeois politics with independence from politics in general”.²²² This assessment was incorrect; Fosatu was sceptical of nationalism and did regard it as petty bourgeois (as several scholars have pointed out), but never refrained from political involvement. Rather, it was concerned *what kind of politics*, as a worker organisation, to get involved in and to forge. It thus sought to ensure that control of the union movement remained in the hands of its members: *political action* was essential, but *political subordination* to the imperatives of parties like the ANC and SACP was to be avoided at all costs. The problem with Sactu, and the basis of its collapse, was *not* that it was involved in politics, but that it did so *to the detriment* of building a strong shopfloor presence, and that it was involved in political campaigns that were *tactically* foolish or *premature*, and

²¹⁹ Sactu cited in *Fosatu Worker News*, *op. cit.* p. 4

²²⁰ Fosatu Worker News, “The Making” *op. cit.*, p. 5

²²¹ See Van Der Linden, “*Workers of the World*”

²²² Fine et al, “In Search”, p. 67

that these problems arose because the unions were *subjected to the party imperatives* of the ANC/SACP, without any regard to their own needs. Therefore, the lesson drawn was that autonomy and self-government *in strong, rooted, unions* was the basis for political activity, *as opposed to an alliance* with political parties being viewed as the basis for political activity.

Such positions (the rejection of vanguardism; non-affiliation to orthodox political parties; the attempt to reconcile economics and politics – or rather merge them *through the unions*) have very close affinities with anarchism and syndicalism, which as we have seen exerted both a direct and an indirect influence on the New Left. This alarmed many of Fosatu's contemporaries, who actually recognised the extent to which workerism paralleled syndicalism. For example, the Trotskyite *Spartacist* commented, “the fact is, these guys were opposed to ‘political parties’ and even to a ‘political vanguard’. They were trapped within trade union politics, quasi-syndicalism”.²²³ Despite the obvious misunderstandings of the historical syndicalist project evident in these statements, and the loose and often flawed use of the term by many of the workerists themselves, these statements are not without basis.

In many but not all respects then, Fosatu broke with mainstream Marxism, and came to quasi-syndicalist positions. This was true for a number of issues: in its understanding trade unions as inherently political; in its argument against the separation of politics and economics; in its rejection of political vanguardism as a necessary and essential component of political activities. (This is true despite the *tactical* tendency, noted above, of attempting to distance itself from “overtly political” activity and campaigns – something that differed from the syndicalism of, for example, the Spanish CNT, which was overtly revolutionary). This co-existed, however, with a more social democratic strand, akin to Eurcommunism, as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Despite Sactu's assertion (directed at Fosatu) that “you cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter”, and its claim that “trade unions must be active in the political sphere as they are in the economic”,²²⁴ Sactu and Fosatu did not actually disagree. The real difference between the two approaches can be found in the meaning given to “politics” by each. Sactu, assumed that politics was expressed, primarily, in

²²³ *Spartacist South Africa*. Newspaper of the African Section of the International Communist League (Fourth International). Winter 2002-3, p. 15

²²⁴ Sactu cited in Lambert, R. 1983. “Sactu and the IC Act” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 29

a political party, hence its alliance with the ANC. That is, Sactu conflated politics with political parties. Workerism on the other hand, was premised on “finding a new politics, and not simply latching onto establishment politics, including the politics of the ANC”.²²⁵ It therefore concerned itself with shifting the structure of power and fundamentally altering existing power relations across all fronts – economic, political and ideological. This runs counter to the more traditional approach of both African nationalism and Marxist-Leninism, which centre upon changing the individuals taking up places of power in the existing structure.

There were those in Fosatu’s leadership that did not subscribe to this workerist approach concerning the relationship between politics and economics. For example, Dlamini echoed the Sactu position:

No, no, no. They [workerists] knew [that my sympathies were with the ANC]. That was why I was always under attack. But they didn’t quite understand why... I didn’t want to sort of expose myself, but I said [...] ‘You [can’t] divide the forces of change and expect them to win the struggle against apartheid as an independent pillar. You needed to join the forces so that when you attack apartheid you attack it from all levels... whether it’s labour, whether its community, whether it was politically.’ That’s the way we [“populist” critics] believed we should go, but they didn’t understand that.²²⁶

6.7. Identity, Culture, Consciousness and Ideology

Nash suggests that Fosatu tended to assume that “identity is the product of ethical choice”, or a transcendent morality that “questions accepted convention” and breaks from the confines of the capitalist ideological model.²²⁷ The early (syndicalist influenced) Gramsci provided a useful language; his notion of counter-hegemony ignited the drive towards the construction of an alternative, specifically working class culture and consciousness that could transcend and begin to counter the cultural hegemony of the dominant class. Many of the Marxists associated with the New Left were generally more likely to emphasise the role of ideas in creating the conditions for revolutionary change, as opposed to seeing them simply as a superstructural reflection of the economic base, with the latter being determinant.

²²⁵ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

²²⁶ Interview with Chris Dlamini, 27th June 2009, Johannesburg

²²⁷ Nash, “The moment of”, p. 69

The historical claim of vanguard parties to dictate action – against, or at least regardless of the will of those they purported to represent – was rejected as morally abhorrent by most the New Left. Similarly, unlike the view taken by most in the New Left, Lenin posited that “the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class... as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia”.²²⁸ Again here workerism breaks with the Marxist mould; rejecting the notion that socialist consciousness is impossible without the existence of a revolutionary vanguard party. Rather, it developed a notion of “organisation as catalyst”, in which there was an “intimate relationship between change in consciousness and organisation”.²²⁹ Thus Fosatu saw the worker-controlled, democratic and effective trade unionism itself as the site of the politicisation through conscientisation and struggle.²³⁰

6.8. Nationalism, Populism and the ANC

Workerists, as was often recognised by critics, distrusted African nationalism. The reason often cited was that nationalist politics tended to be “petit bourgeois politics” (Dube)²³¹ and therefore “not necessarily for worker interests” (Mayekiso).²³² The source of this critique was that workerists “defined the problem as a labour-capital one” (Webster)²³³ – which had important consequences for workers and for the longevity of workerism, including that workerists “weren’t really attuned to, and didn’t really bother to learn the languages of, African people”,²³⁴ and that “the national struggle, the colonial component of it... [wasn’t] adequately dealt with at the time”.²³⁵

This position on nationalism was however partly historically grounded, based in the “failures of African nationalism in the post-colonial context, and the way that trade unions have been

²²⁸ Lenin, “What is to be Done?”

²²⁹ Nash, “The Moment of”, p. 71

²³⁰ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”; Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

²³¹ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

²³² Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

²³³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²³⁴ Webster, *op. cit*; a similar critique is made by Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*

²³⁵ Webster, *op. cit*

really... sort of muzzled”²³⁶ by nationalist and populist leaders and regimes. As such, the ANC (characterised as historically a “popular mass movement”) was viewed with a considerable amount of scepticism.²³⁷ Furthermore, Fosatu believed, given the exigencies of its political position in the context of the Cold War, that the ANC was unable to alter its character because of the necessity for it to “retain its very important international position”, which forced to remain “a popular mass movement”.²³⁸ According to Sauls therefore, the ANC was “a black nationalist movement just like the white nationalist movement under apartheid”, and that wasn’t the position of “just the leadership; it was even amongst the worker leaders, you know, the factory shop stewards”.²³⁹

Similarly, Fosatu lambasted the ANC’s “populism” – typified by its strategy of “mobilising ‘the people’ as much as the workers”²⁴⁰ regardless of class. (This Fosatu also saw as being the fundamental praxis of the UDF²⁴¹). The central difficulty with this form of organisation and strategic orientation for the workerists was that the category “the people” failed to recognise the existence of distinct social groups with distinct interests. Thus, according to Erwin, a “populist” movement constitutes “an alliance of classes whose economic interests differ but who find common cause against [a] regime”.²⁴² While Erwin recognised the usefulness of such for the purposes of “liberation politics”, he insisted on the limitations of such an alliance in the success of “transformation politics” for the working class: “a problem has occurred when the radical intelligentsia, working class or peasantry have... questioned private property and the capitalist economy. Such questioning now begins to strike at the roots of any popular alliance”.²⁴³

Because Fosatu’s politics were “transformation politics”, the federation was concerned with preventing the subsumption of working class interests under those of nascent “petit bourgeois” nationalist elites concerned with a more narrow “liberation politics” and the conquest of political power – as several critics, notable Pillay,²⁴⁴ have recognised. Foster’s charge (obviously directed at the ANC and UDF leaderships) that “those that ask of workers

²³⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

²³⁷ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”

²³⁸ *ibid*

²³⁹ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

²⁴⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements. Fosatu Education Series Booklet, p. 5

²⁴¹ Plaut, “Debates in a Shark Tank”

²⁴² Erwin, 1985. “The Question of Unity”, p. 55

²⁴³ *ibid*

²⁴⁴ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”

their political support without allowing them the right to build their own organisation must answer for *their* real motives”²⁴⁵ is just one expression of this distrust.

Furthermore, within workerism there was a recognition of the historically authoritarian nature of many “populist” movements, in which political mobilisation was often generated by charismatic leaders at mass rallies, rather than through patient, democratic, organisation-building. This style was, of course, to the detriment of workers control and effective organisations (hence the claim that “the populists... would just have these mass rallies and so on but there’s no base, there’s no organisation”²⁴⁶ with “people taking instructions on what to do”.²⁴⁷) For Foster, in contrast with “populist” organisations built around the talents of charismatic leaders, “we didn’t believe in a leader – I mean there was no leader in Fosatu”.²⁴⁸ Another weakness inherent in “populism” was that political leaderships “would sell out easily”; that “leaders could be quickly divorced from the mass membership”, and “that they would be peripheral or temporary because they didn’t have the strength to withstand over time”.²⁴⁹ Importantly, these insights and claims were not (according to Adler), abstractly theorised, but drawn from the South African context: “You had a very clear experience with what a populist worker organisation meant – you had rolling strikes; you had people who kind of took money and didn’t account for it”.²⁵⁰

This scepticism towards both nationalism and populism led Fosatu to urge workers to “strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even while they are part of the wider popular struggle”.²⁵¹ Furthermore under the workerist rubric, workerist activists evolved a strategy based on “the idea that we would sort of ring-fence workers from the broader nationalist history of our country”²⁵² by building independent worker organisations, “necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will have no option but to turn against their worker supporters.”²⁵³

²⁴⁵ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. *The Workers Struggle*, p. 26, emphasis original

²⁴⁶ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

²⁴⁷ Interview with Fed Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

²⁴⁸ Joe Foster, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²⁵⁰ *ibid*

²⁵¹ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle: Where does Fosatu stand?”, p. 24

²⁵² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁵³ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle: Where does Fosatu stand?”

While these workerist concerns over the limitations of nationalism and “populism” are definitely not unfounded, at times these claims – particularly with regard to the “populist” nature of the UDF – seem somewhat misapplied. Of course, the structure of the UDF, which gave equal representation to trade unions comprising tens of thousands of members, and (for example) women’s organisations comprising only a few activists, was problematic (a fact admitted by the UDF leadership). This structure gave “populist” formations undue influence, prompting the fear that Fosatu would be manipulated by smaller groups. Similarly, the obvious connection between the UDF leadership and the ANC-in-exile was potentially a problem for the political direction of the UDF (linking it to nationalism as well), as was the “non-worker” composition of its leadership.

However, these assessments overstated the multi-class composition and undemocratic nature of the UDF, as well as the extent to which the ANC, and in fact the UDF’s own leadership, controlled the UDF. The UDF was a broad front, and sections of the UDF articulated a radical, participatory democratic and anti-capitalist politics that closely paralleled that of Fosatu workerism. For example, the UDF developed a concept of “peoples’ power” through which they endorsed the grassroots democratic structures that had by the mid 1980s begun to emerge in townships.²⁵⁴ With the expansion of “ungovernable areas” in the earlier period of the UDF as “state authority collapsed in many townships”,²⁵⁵ “popular state structures” such as street committees emerged which eventually “took over many of the functions of local government”.²⁵⁶ Sisulu thus distinguished between the UDF’s earlier period and calls for ungovernability (where no one has control), and the later period of period “people’s power” (where “the people are starting to exercise control”²⁵⁷). Organs of “peoples’ power” were for

²⁵⁴ See Seekings, J. 2000. *The UDF: a History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*. David Phillip: South Africa; Morobe, M. 1987. “Towards a People’s Democracy: The UDF View” in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 40; Suttner, R. 2004. “The UDF period and its meaning for contemporary South Africa” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 3

²⁵⁵ Swilling, “the United Democratic Front”, p. 102

²⁵⁶ Neocosmos, M. 1998 “From People’s Politics to State Politics” in Olukoshi, A.O. (ed.) *The Politics of Opposition in Africa*, Northern Africa Institute: Uppsala, p. 203. In Alexandra, for example, street committees were embedded in a systematic form of bottom-up organisation. Here, “yard committees” were set up to deal with daily problems. Two representatives from the each yard committee were elected as representatives to block committees, and four representatives from each block committee were elected to sit on street committees. It was planned that two representatives from each street committee would be elected to a central co-ordinating committee, which was to be formally launched in 1986, the committees to become responsible for a number of functions in the judicial, administrative and maintenance arenas; they played a role that was both educative and empowering. See Jochelson. K. 1990. “Reform, Repression and Resistance in South Africa: a case study of Alexandra Township, 1979-1989” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 8

²⁵⁷ Sisulu, Z. 1986. “People’s Education for Peoples’ Power: keynote address to the Conference of the National Education Crisis Committee” in *Transformation* 1

Neocosmos the equivalent to workers' control in Fosatu,²⁵⁸ and extended into having educative and even judicial functions – with the establishment of “people’s education” and “people’s courts”.²⁵⁹

The UDF envisioned these structures prefiguring²⁶⁰ a new society in the here and now (where “means and ends became fused”²⁶¹); as *already constituted* “embryonic forms of future mass democratic government”.²⁶² This was congruent with ideas common amongst workerists: in the same way that democratic union structures were could control from the employer on the shop floor in preparation for worker control of production (See Ch. 8, esp. 8.4.1; 8.4.3, also 8.4.5), so the UDF sought to “wrest control of the townships from the state”.²⁶³

Similarly, the UDF rejected representative and parliamentary democracy as “limited and narrow”²⁶⁴ proposing instead direct working class control “over all areas of daily existence”;²⁶⁵ it advocated “elected” and “accountable” “collective leadership” operating on the basis of mandates and report backs.²⁶⁶ It was even involved, alongside workerism, in questioning the premises of the Freedom Charter²⁶⁷ (although as Suttner has noted, the UDF was less critical; its questioning was more a “deepening” of the interpretation of “the people shall govern” concept contained in the Freedom Charter).²⁶⁸ All of these aspects have much in common with workerism.

This radicalism within sections of the UDF was even recognised by some of the workerists in Fosatu. Barrett, for instance, recalls that “within the UDF structure...was an internal questioning of the ANC’s position” and a corresponding development of “the position... which said, look... we don’t simply want black capitalism, we want something different”.²⁶⁹

²⁵⁸ Neocosmos. *op. cit.*, 219

²⁵⁹ Lodge and Nasson, *All Here and Now*. p. 135. Also see Seekings, J. 1989. “People’s Courts and Popular Politics” in G. Moss and I. Obery. (eds). *South African Review* 5, Ravan Press: Johannesburg; Seekings, ““Trailing Behind the Masses””; Seekings, J. 1992. “From Quiescence to ‘People’s Power: Township politics in Kagiso 1985 – 6” in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 18, No.1

²⁶⁰ Suttner, R. 2004. “Legacies and Meanings of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Period for Contemporary South Africa” (Review) in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 30, No. 3, p. 6; Morobe, *op. cit.*, p. 82

²⁶¹ Suttner, “Legacies and Meanings”, p. 63

²⁶² Jochelson. K. 1990. “Reform, Repression and” p. 8

²⁶³ Morobe, “Towards a People’s Democracy”, p. 84

²⁶⁴ Morobe, *op. cit.*, p. 82

²⁶⁵ Morobe *op. cit.*, p. 83

²⁶⁶ Morobe *op. cit.*, p. 84-85

²⁶⁷ Morobe, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁸ Suttner, *op cit.*, p. 62.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

Similarly, a UDF report presented at its 1985 national conference, showed that the grasp of the ANC (and indeed the power of the UDF leadership over the UDF base) was far weaker than Fosatu accounts recognised: “In many areas, the organisations trail behind the masses”, suggesting that “we have not been coordinating effectively”.²⁷⁰ This was because the UDF’s leadership was not actively involved in local and grassroots struggles, the result of which was that it struggled to keep apace with political developments.²⁷¹

It is true that these democratic, bottom up characteristics operated alongside tendencies towards authoritarianism and disorganisation. The relationship between the ANC and UDF was never systematically discussed or mandated, but rather assumed. At the same time that the popular committees were radically altering the face of local governance, even supplanting the state, and bringing into question the UDF’s supposedly “populist” nature, the UDF launched a “Release Mandela” campaign, which essentially served to confirm the assumptions of the workerists. However, the workerists tended to focus on the negative features of the UDF, often failing to acknowledge that an emergent politics that was far more radical and democratic was emerging within its structures. So, while it must be recognised that the UDF was fundamentally contradictory, claims by workerists asserting that it was fundamentally undemocratic and populist were overgeneralised.

But furthermore, this translated into a major strategic limitation within workerism. If the workerists accepted registration and participation in industrial councils on the grounds that these official institutions *could* be transformed and made to serve the interests of the worker movement, it seems peculiar that the workerists failed to apply the same logic to the UDF, which was not only a non-state formation but also had within it from the start organisational forms and ideas perfectly congruent with those of the workerist union movement. This reflects an inconsistency on the part of workerism, the result of which was the dissolution of the UDF, along with the forms of popular power it helped midwife,²⁷² upon the release of nationalist leaders and the unbanning of the ANC.

For Webster this reflects the theoretical limitations of Marxism in dealing with oppressed strata in society outside of the industrial proletariat (or in dealing with a “Polanyian focus on

²⁷⁰ cited in Lodge and Nasson, *All Here and Now*, p. 76-77

²⁷¹ Seekings, *The UDF: a history*

²⁷² See Ch. 8, esp. 8.4.5

commoditisation” over “Marxist issues of exploitation”²⁷³). But this was also reinforced by the “simple experiential point” of being forced to grapple with issues in the sphere of reproduction. For Webster, “the reason why the “populist” position came out was because of the failure, I think, of the Fosatu leadership to deal with those issues [of reproduction]. So there was a theoretical and strategic limitation that led to the resurgence of “populist” thinking”.²⁷⁴ I would argue that this limitation was also a function of the failures of workerism and other sections of the New Left to adequately deal with longer-term issues of transformation, and of *strategy*: workerists failed to appreciate the importance of a solid, workable programme, including a cohesive and coherent politics.

Although workerists rejected *nationalism*, the tendency in the literature to posit that this meant that workerists were unconcerned with the *national liberation* of black workers is fundamentally incorrect, and perhaps a deliberate distortion of the workerist project. It is also fundamentally incorrect that nationalism is the only solution to national liberation. However, whilst committed to “liberation”, workerists had not adequately formulated that alternative: “it was a question of how to do it”.²⁷⁵ This failure to adequately formulate a clear strategy was a fundamental weakness of workerism, which had important implications for the survival of the tradition.

6.9. Internationalism

In the international arena in the 1980s Fosatu was “involved in a legitimacy dispute with Sactu, primarily because of funding and support”.²⁷⁶ The dispute had its roots in the decline of Sactu in the 1960’s. Ten years into its existence and at the height of apartheid, Sactu was moribund; its leadership having either been driven into exile by the apartheid regime, or based elsewhere having involved themselves in recruiting for the ANC/SACP armed struggle, or been jailed or banned.

This would have a formative role to play in the trajectory of the South African labour relations. In its public position, as discussed previously, Sactu characterised the apartheid state as characterised as “fascist” – a position that was closely tied to its shift from union

²⁷³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁷⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁷⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

²⁷⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

work to armed work and responsible for its focus on promoting South Africa's isolation and sanctions. As a result it also drifted into the position that any unions operating aboveground in South Africa must therefore be "puppet unions" and part of the apartheid structure.²⁷⁷ Although later Sactu and ANC accounts have glossed over this position, for many years Sactu was openly and overtly hostile to the new unions like Tuacc and Fosatu on the grounds that they were "yellow" unions and collaborators with apartheid "fascism". Conversely, Sactu insisted that it alone represented (from exile) African trade unionism in South Africa.

There were also more direct causes of conflict between Sactu and the new unions, and Fosatu's policy of direct contact (or "direct links") between workers of different countries was a major source. In April 1982, Sactu published an article in its mouthpiece *Workers' Unity* entitled "direct links – stinks!"²⁷⁸ in which it attacked Fosatu's policy of worker-to-worker contact, accusing the new unions of putting Sactu's exiled activists in jeopardy, of selling out to the apartheid state, and of attempting to circumvent Sactu's grip on the sphere of international labour solidarity (which had until then been the sole preserve of Sactu). (Of course, Fosatu did not receive any gains from Sactu's monopoly, which was used to raise funds and aid for the ANC and not for union work inside the country).

As a result of Sactu's position, Fosatu's leadership "found a lot of resistance from unions overseas and it took a long time to wear that down".²⁷⁹ Of course the criticism was reciprocated and Fosatu retaliated with "criticism of the South African Congress of Trade Unions in exile for trying to prevent direct links between the new unions and trade unions overseas,"²⁸⁰ and for having "the view that they were the sole representatives of the South African working class" – a view that "they were not shy about expressing".²⁸¹

The idea of "direct links" was raised as early as 1973 by several of the new unions that had sprung up in the wake of the Durban strikes.²⁸² However, these unions had "lacked the resources to initiate such contacts"²⁸³ and it was not until the formation of Fosatu that direct international worker solidarity was formalised into official policy.

²⁷⁷ Steinhart, 1988. "South African Labour and International Support" in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, September edn, p. 18

²⁷⁸ *Workers' Unity*. 1982. "Direct Links – Stinks!", April edn.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

²⁸⁰ Lewis, "Review", p. 120

²⁸¹ Fanaroff, *op. cit.*

²⁸² Steinhart, "South African Labour"

²⁸³ Steinhart, *op. cit.*, p. 19

While Fosatu was certainly the centrepiece of Sactu's attack, another group *within* the ANC alliance shared the criticism. A ginger group of unionists associated with the (Trotskyist) Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, including Legassick, Hemson and Rob Peterson, had begun to question the Sactu's policy of isolation, urging reconsideration in a paper presented to the Sactu executive.²⁸⁴ (Some of these activists were involved in the Tuacc unions prior to the formation of Fosatu, which no doubt had a role to play in their views). The group was subsequently denigrated by the Sactu executive as comprising "half dozen white intellectuals" and workerists,²⁸⁵ without the interests of black workers at heart. They were suspended and later expelled from the ANC, going on to form the South African Labour Education Project (Salep).

Although the workerist (as it is defined here) label does not really apply to this group, their ideas on the question of international trade union links were similar to those contained in workerism and Fosatu. Like Fosatu, they placed emphasis on "low level and face-to-face contacts between workers" which reflected a "distrust of labour bureaucrats and the hierarchy of the national and international federations".²⁸⁶ Fosatu's "emphasis on shop floor organising, internal union bureaucracy and independence from the state controlled labour apparatus"²⁸⁷ was a decisive factor in the formulation of its policy.

Similarly, there is some evidence that the workerist group emphasized links between workers in different countries because, as Webster puts it, "it is difficult to build socialism in one country" because "to build it in isolation... means that the economy is drawn invariably into the world capitalist economy".²⁸⁸ Thus the "importance of contact between workers and unions of different countries" was stressed for the reason that because "the same companies are operating all around the world... and they do the same things to workers".²⁸⁹ However, in keeping with its location in the New Left and corresponding emphasis on "action", rather than considered theory and strategy, it seems that the emphasis on internationalism and links

²⁸⁴ Steinhart, "South African Labour", p. 19

²⁸⁵ Mbeki cited in Steinhart, *op. cit.* p. 24

²⁸⁶ Steinhart, *op. cit.*, p. 18

²⁸⁷ Leighton cited in Steinhart, *op. cit.* p. 19

²⁸⁸ Webster, E. 1990. "Self-management in Yugoslavia: failed experiment in democratic socialism?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 71

²⁸⁹ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.11. Telegram from Fosatu Western Cape to Ian Bissel of *Fosatu Worker News*

between workers in different countries was much more pragmatically driven²⁹⁰ in the case of Fosatu than it was in Salep.

For Adler, this stance taken on internationalism “highlights the kind of contradictory actions of Fosatu all the way through”,²⁹¹ which he describes as “the kind of difference between ... pragmatism and ideological positions”.²⁹² For example, according to him, Fosatu’s relationship with the international trade union movement was driven by three practical concerns, the first being funding, the second being international solidarity and pressure, and the third being that “there just were particular unions and particular individuals in the union movement who were very helpful and supportive at the level of providing advice, experience... mentoring, that kind of stuff”.²⁹³ Therefore if the approach of the Salep dissidents was driven the ideological concerns and theory of “permanent revolution”, the same clearly did not apply in Fosatu.

However, although Fosatu’s position was pragmatic, the question of international worker and trade union solidarity *was* also approached as a matter of principle and argued theoretically, clearly based on an anti-capitalist class analysis and a corresponding rejection of nationalism. A statement in the 1986 *Cosatu Workers Diary* (merely one year after Fosatu’s dissolution) resonates with the workerist position: “Workers must build organisations throughout the world because all workers have the same interest, that is: TO BUILD A WORLD FREE FROM EXPLOITATION!”²⁹⁴

For John Gomomo, the fact that “co-operation is not developed throughout the industry world-wide” and that “similar levels of organisation do not exist in every plant”²⁹⁵ was an obstacle to the advance of the worker struggle, and thus in order “to protect our members” it was argued, “we have to support unionisation and extend organisation everywhere”.²⁹⁶ Similarly, Fosatu “stated its belief in international worker solidarity” for the reason that

²⁹⁰ See Southall, R. 1995. *Imperialism or Solidarity? International Labour and South African Trade Unions*. University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town

²⁹¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹² *ibid*

²⁹³ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹⁴ *Cosatu Workers’ Diary* 1986: no page numbers; also see *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1980 “Interview with Freddie Sauls”

²⁹⁵ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1985. “Interview: Union Organisation in Volkswagen”, Vol. 11, No. 1., p. 71

²⁹⁶ *ibid*

“worker to worker contact is the most effective counter to multi-national corporations”.²⁹⁷ A concrete example of the benefits of this sort of action can be found in the 1981 strike at Leyland in Cape Town. The strike was supported by British Leyland workers who demanded that dismissed workers be reinstated and that their demand of R2 per hour be met.²⁹⁸

Although in practice Fosatu’s central focus and bulk of activity was on building unions and extending workers’ rights in South Africa, its leadership was aware of the “vacuum” in the international trade union solidarity arena, and the need to expand its commitment to internationalism.²⁹⁹ There are several other novel examples in which the workerist advocacy of internationalism was put into practice, including Fosatu’s publication of a booklet outlining the struggles of the British workers, and a corresponding article in *Fosatu Bulletin* in detailing the widespread international support the strike received.³⁰⁰ Fosatu also considered a union to union “news exchange” – a *Fosatu Worker News* “arrangement” through which publications could be shared between international unions, thereby promoting international solidarity.³⁰¹

Any discussion of workerist internationalism is incomplete without some analysis of the way in which workerism connected with the international trade union movement of the time, given the Cold War politics that shaped that movement’s trajectory. Interestingly, the majority of Fosatu’s external funding came from the (Western-aligned) International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), where there were “very strong pressures... to supplant the Sactu recognition with Fosatu”,³⁰² given the ANC’s relationship to the SACP and Soviet Union. However, Fosatu’s preference would have been that its support was derived primarily from the “Scandinavian and Dutch unions directly”³⁰³ – precisely because it

²⁹⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.1.1. “An Introduction to the Tuacc” in *Fosatu Worker News*, June edn, p. 6.

²⁹⁸ Fosatu Worker’s Diary, 1986

²⁹⁹ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the International Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

³⁰⁰ HP: AH 2065 D10. Fergusson, K. 1985 “A Rich Seam of Solidarity: the British miners’ strike” in *Fosatu Bulletin*. HP: AH 2065 D10. International Labour Reports September/October in *Tuacc Bulletin*, 31 January 1985. Although the *Bulletin* was intended as a broad educational platform designed to keep workers in touch with current affairs, the inclusion of such articles are also undoubtedly intended to foster a sense of international solidarity, and to sow within the ranks of its membership a sense of solidarity with the international working class, and to demonstrate the similarity of problems shared by it.

³⁰¹ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report by the International Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984.

³⁰² Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2010, Cape Town; also Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³⁰³ Adler, *op. cit.*

objected to attempts at dividing workers along Cold War lines.³⁰⁴ Therefore Fosatu argued that it would “not affiliate to organisations such as the ICFTU and in general would not participate in any international activity aimed at dividing workers”.³⁰⁵ According to Adler this included retaining distance from the American Federation of Labour – Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), which was deeply involved in the Cold War and widely distrusted by many more radical unionists, in South Africa and elsewhere.³⁰⁶ Strangely, and this is accepted by Adler, by accepting money from the ICFTU, which was denied to Sactu, Fosatu actually did just that: “wittingly or unwittingly playing straight into [the split]”.³⁰⁷ At the same time, it fuelled Sactu’s caricature of Fosatu as a yellow union operating on behalf of imperialism.

However, while a commitment to internationalism clearly did feature as part of Fosatu policy and practice, it was perhaps not taken to its logical extreme given that workerism because Fosatu did not hold as an objective, at least in the foreseeable future, the abolition of the nation-state. By way of comparison then, and for the purposes of clarification, the syndicalist label sometimes attached to Fosatu’s leadership was in certain senses incorrectly applied – particularly with regard to the issue of internationalism. Syndicalists include in their analysis a critique of the violence *inherent* in the inter-state system, asking how anyone could “speak of international solidarity when they wanted to keep states – unless they are dreaming of the universal states, that is to say universal slavery like the great emperors and popes”, precisely because “the state by its nature” was seen as “the very rupture of this solidarity and permanent cause of war?”.³⁰⁸ Although Fosatu’s “small and fragile” internationalism was certainly related to the federation’s then very new existence and short lifespan, it is arguable that it was also partly a function of the particular way in which the state was theorised, all of which led Fosatu to understand international solidarity in pragmatic albeit principled terms, and less as a project to overcome states and state boundaries.

6.10. Conclusion: “The Art of the Possible”

³⁰⁴ See Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity?*. Strangely, and this is accepted by Adler, by accepting money from the ICFTU, which was denied to Sactu, Fosatu actually did just that: “wittingly or unwittingly playing straight into [the split]” (Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg)

³⁰⁵ HP: AH 1999 C1.1.3. Fosatu Policy Proposals

³⁰⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³⁰⁷ *ibid*

³⁰⁸ Bakunin, M. 1967-72. *Marxism, Freedom and the State*. Republished by Freedom Press: London, p. 43, available at < <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/mf-state/index.htm>>

Although it cannot be said that workerists subscribed to a coherent theoretical doctrine, it is clear, firstly, that they did have a set of definite ideas – which were formed in response to a particular set of circumstances, and secondly, that these should be understood as located firmly in the New Left. This may run contrary to workerists’ own perceptions. However, because *content of ideas* (rather than self-identification) has been used as the basis of definition here, this does not detract from the central argument.

Because of this, the core defining feature of workerism was its pragmatic and eclectic appropriation of the theoretical insights of various positions, which was manifest in the occasional disjuncture between theory and practice, a pragmatic approach to theory and corresponding tactical flexibility, willingness to dismiss accepted notions where they didn’t fit (including from Marxism) and to ignore the supposed limitations these notions imposed on its practice. This praxis was described by Adler as being “*par excellence* the art of the possible”.³⁰⁹ Like the New Left therefore, workerists were “not ‘good Marxists’ in the sense that they [were] *not* ‘resolute, steadfast, loyal’”.³¹⁰ They subscribed to a view of theory as secondary to “action”, something to be formulated out of collective action rather than prescribing it.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³¹⁰ Femia, “Western Marxism”, p. 98

Chapter 7

7. In the Short-term: Workerist Strategy and Tactics

“The form of the struggle may of itself raise the issue of transformation to a position of centrality... [Fosatu’s] unionism is based on shop-floor organisation and democratic participation of worker representatives in control of the union and negotiation.... This generates an effective and militant unionism but it also addresses the problems of transformation since it establishes democratic organisation within the productive process itself”

(Erwin, A. 1985. “The Question of Unity in Struggle”
in South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 11, No. 1)



Figure 7. Henkel Workers on Strike. Taffy Adler Papers, AH 2065/J60

7.1. Introduction

Thus far I have attempted to show that theoretically and analytically, workerism was far more a product of its time than many accounts recognise, or that many workerists themselves are either aware or willing to admit. Thus workerism was certainly a deeply indigenous expression, displaying many unique and creative characteristics, produced out of the

particularities of the apartheid South African political landscape. However, it cannot be divorced from a broader set of circumstances, and in particular the emergence of the international New Left phenomenon. Workerism was therefore the product of the assimilation of the New Left in South Africa, despite its delayed emergence.

The New Left, like workerism, was not simply a movement of ideas – it was simultaneously connected to a distinctive set of practices and a particular attitude to the relationship of theory to action which can be clearly distinguished from the praxis of the Old Left. In the previous chapter it was stated that the workerist movement was pragmatic and eclectic, and often contradictory; and that this often manifested in a delinking of theory and practice and in inconsistent application of principles to practice. The following two chapters encompass an attempt to elaborate on the way in which the ideas and theories developed by Fosatu's workerists (embedded as they were in action and pragmatism) were translated, in a particular set of circumstances, into a strategy and elaborated in tactical decisions. This chapter deals with the workerist strategy as it was laid out in the short-term; the next deals with the longer-term strategic thought embodied in workerism.

This chapter demonstrates that Fosatu's workerists evolved a fairly effective short-term programme. It centred on independent, worker-controlled (and thus open and legal), non-racial, national, industrial and strategically placed unions, organised into a "tight" federation (with shared policies and pooled resources). It prioritised the winning of reforms as a means to developing the sort of strong organisational basis required, firstly, for survival of the federation in the repressive apartheid context, and secondly, in laying the basis for the eventual overthrow of apartheid and capitalism in the long-term. Much of the insight for this strategy was derived from lesson drawn for the failure of Fosatu's predecessors – particularly the ICU and Sactu.

Importantly, the workerist strategy, which nonetheless comprised both short and (to an extent) longer-term components, and the tactical choices they elicited, were just as characteristic of the New Left as was its theory. In particular, this relates to the content of the ideas about how to affect social change, its strategic eclecticism, democratic organisational forms and expression in a movement. Its mode of operation, likewise, was typical of the New Left: based in pragmatism, a sense of the present, and praxis in which theory was

subordinated to “action”. While the short-term workerist strategy is a crucial aspect of what distinguishes its uniqueness and success, its longer-term thought was abortive.

7.2. Aims and Objectives

Before any discussion of the strategic and tactical aspects of workerism can be undertaken, it is first necessary to understand exactly what the workerists were attempting to achieve. Of course, being a trade union federation, Fosatu necessarily had as a central concern the material and social well-being of its membership, and the immediate defence and extension of their rights, including political rights, under capitalism. Its short-term strategy was thus largely, but certainly not entirely, conceived to achieve these ends.

However, this does not suggest that Fosatu was simply a “business union”, concerning itself with the negotiation of the terms of exploitation of labour by capital. In fact, as will be discussed here and in the following chapter, Fosatu’s short-term programme was understood as the crucial *foundation* on which its far more ambitious *longer-term aims* of overthrowing both apartheid *and* capitalism rested, for it was understood that only with the achievement of a powerful, unified, resilient, independent and deeply democratic workers movement, led by politically conscious, effective and accountable worker leaders, could the dismantling of the exploitative and oppressive structures of capitalism and apartheid take place.¹

7.3. In the Short-Term

In the short-term Fosatu therefore threw its weight into building those strong, resilient and powerful unions, which would be able to *escape* apartheid repression on the one hand, and *resist* it on the other. In order to do this, the workerists participated in developing a short to medium-term strategy and praxis that was distinctive enough to attract considerable attention and debate, and powerful enough to lay the foundation for the development of Cosatu – one of the largest and most powerful labour movements in Africa.²

A large part of Fosatu’s short-term strategy was formulated in response to what its leadership understood to be the failures and lessons of their predecessors, particularly the fate of Sactu,

¹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11. “Editorial”

² See Dwyer, P. 2009. “South Africa under the ANC”

which was discussed in the previous chapter, and of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (the ICU), an important union that grew rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s but collapsed dramatically – because, Fosatu analyses suggested, of weak structures and a failure to win real gains for members.³

It also reflected, on one hand, a significant Marxist influence and identification with Marxism, and on the other, a remarkable willingness, not uncommon in the New Left, to challenge Marxist doctrine and embrace diverse influences and ideas. This must be seen against the fact that the New Left was both pragmatic and eclectic, not adhering to any one single theoretical doctrine. The rather experimental approach of the workerists should therefore be understood as incorporating influence from a diverse set of movements and ideologies. This approach induced within workerism an extreme strategic and tactical flexibility.

I suggest that, in part because of its location in the New Left, workerism absorbed and processed many strategic notions drawn from historical anarchism and syndicalism, and these too were replicated in its own strategic agenda. It also developed, to some extent independently, ideas that paralleled historic syndicalism. However, if workerism's Marxism was loose and flexible, its approach to anarchism and syndicalism was marked by a notable ignorance of some of the core features and ideas of the historic anarchist and syndicalist movement. It was similar to revolutionary syndicalism, or anarcho-syndicalism in important respects, but should not be misconstrued as thoroughly revolutionary syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist. This is unsurprising given that the New Left was permeated by thought and organisational forms quite clearly anarchist- or syndicalist- inspired. This is true regardless of the fact that many workerists identified outwardly as Marxist.

At the same time, as I will show in Chapter 8, this ran alongside a social democratic trend, akin to Eurocommunism, a division in strategy that generated on-going ambivalences and tensions on a wide range of issues.

³ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985, "The Making of the Working Class, Part 11: "The ICU collapses", October edn. *Fosatu Worker News*

7.3.1. The Centrality of Reforms

A central feature of workerism was the recognition that effective unionisation demanded that the immediate material needs of the workers be satisfied by the organisation. This was seen as the great failure of the ICU, which failed to carry out successful strikes and wage struggles, eventually leading to mass disenchantment by the membership.

For Fosatu's leadership, mobilising and attracting a membership, while crucial, was insufficient if not consolidated by strong organisation. Strong organisation was the basis for – and was reinforced by – successful struggles for immediate gains by members. This was the fundamental lesson of the ICU as understood by the workerists: “the ICU had no strategy or plan. It mobilised people but then failed to organise them”.⁴

Therefore, gaining the trust of workers was crucial to building powerful unions, and this could only be achieved by successfully furthering worker interests, and required that measurable victories were won. This led Fosatu to place a significant amount of emphasis on developing *winnable* demands: “workers were more likely to give their support to more pressing and “winnable” demands... which – when they were won – would further strengthen worker organisation”.⁵

Thus, Fosatu criticised Sactu in the 1950s, with specific reference to a mass stayaway called for the 26th June 1956: this made winnable demands (“one pound a day”) with ones that were simply unwinnable, and imposed by ANC leaders (the “Nats must go” i.e. the apartheid government should be ousted).⁶ The second demand was impossible for a small union like Sactu – and certainly not with a one-day strike.

This attention to gaining the trust of workers through winning the everyday economic demands of workers was to play a significant role in the success of the Fosatu unions, and that activity to which the bulk of Fosatu's energy was devoted. Thus, for Sauls, a worker's “interest is bread and butter, not political concepts” which requires that “you have to marry it up”.⁷ For Dube, Fosatu was concerned “not just [with] bread and butter issues” but

⁴ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “The Making of the Working Class, part 11: The ICU collapses”, October edn. p. 11

⁵ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements, p. 6

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth,

understood that “*that’s where you start* or else the people won’t come and support you; they need to benefit directly from belonging to the organisation”.⁸

There are important parallels here with anarchist and syndicalist thinking, which again testifies to the permeation of these currents through the New Left. The anarcho-syndicalist Rocker, for example, stressed the need for workers’ material needs to be met: if they were unwilling to win better conditions, they would hardly be willing to undertake the revolutionary reconstruction of social life; if they were suffering from hunger and cold, they would have little interest in radical theory.⁹ This is just one quasi-syndicalist feature of the workerist strategy.

While Fosatu’s leadership understood trade unions themselves as political (“politics was seen as part of class struggle”),¹⁰ the workerists argued, drawing from what they understood to be a fundamental lesson of the failure of Sactu, that outwardly and *purely* political unionism, which neglected the basic union work, particularly in the context of apartheid repression where many workers would be dissuaded from joining out of fear of victimization, and without actually addressing the every-day material needs of worker members, was understood as being a recipe for failure. Sactu was seen as failing in the 1950s, in that the “day to day organisation of factories through effective factory committees was seriously neglected at times, as large amounts of energy were spent on political issues (e.g. stayaway campaigns)”.¹¹

Therefore, in contrast to the old Sactu, Fosatu’s prime objective was to “proceed step by step to improve on the demands of workers”.¹² This was undoubtedly largely part of an attempt to escape repression by presenting itself as less political than was actually the case, but also part of its strategy to resist any repression that might be meted out to the federation.

⁸ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth, my emphasis

⁹ Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, Chapter 5. Also see Maximoff, G.P. 1952. *Constructive Anarchism: the debate on the platform*. Maximoff Memorial Publication Committee: Chicago; Bakunin, M. 1971. “The Policy of the International”, in Dolgoff (ed.) *Bakunin on Anarchy: selected works by the activist-founder of world anarchism*, George Allen and Unwin: London

¹⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2010, Cape Town

¹¹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, “The Making of the Working Class, Part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance”

¹² *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Interview with Freddie Sauls”, p. 61

Sactu did not seem to have drawn the lesson.¹³ Sactu's critique of Fosatu's registration was interpreted to mean that "they [Fosatu] regard registration as the end of the struggle".¹⁴ This shows that the Sactu position was "tantamount to a declaration that all reforms must be shunned because a fight for them necessarily entails a compromise on larger principles".¹⁵ Sactu denied this, but the Fine *et al* is difficult to dispute: since Sactu posited that apartheid was "fascist" and that union work was impossible (the basis for the notion that Tuacc / Fosatu were "yellow" unions allied to apartheid), and that only armed struggle to overthrow the apartheid state was a feasible strategy, it certainly *did* in effect reject all reforms. By contrast, winning reforms, even tiny wage increases, played in Fosatu thinking— not as an end in themselves, but as a way to gradually build up the strength of the working class for its eventual self-liberation from both capitalism and apartheid.

7.3.2. Worker Control and the Role of White Intellectuals

In a similar vein, the workerists believed that the genuine control of the union by ordinary members, who identified the movement as their own and were willing to fight for it, was a basic premise for the survival of the organisation in the heavily repressive context of apartheid South Africa.¹⁶ It was thus a prerequisite for a the building of working class movement that was not simply a "paper tiger",¹⁷ but a powerful force that could challenge the *status quo* in the longer term. According to Foster, this was central in informing the workerist rejection of the SACP, where "decisions... would be taken" above, "and handed down".¹⁸

Because workerists "didn't support that sort of operation", they argued instead for a syndicalist-style organisational form whereby decisions "should come from the bottom up".¹⁹ Therefore, one of the most important reasons for worker control was that:

¹³ Sactu itself admitted this failure at times: at its second Congress in 1957, it noted the "failure on our part to act as the spearhead of the working class in its fight for immediate wage increases and a happier life" would "lead to the defeat of the workers [sic]" (HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements, p. 4). However, in the 1960s, Sactu abandoned union work entirely, in favour of armed struggle.

¹⁴ Fine et al, "In Search of Concessions", p. 57

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg. See also Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*.

¹⁷ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁸ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town; also mentioned in interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹ Foster, *op. cit*. According to Buhlungu, this was something all the democratic unions in the period had realised (See Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*)

... if the unions are strongly rooted in the shop floor, even if you take away the leadership, the union can regenerate. And the example used of course was Sactu, where you took away the leadership and there was nothing left. So we differentiated ourselves very strongly from that leadership-based kind of unionism, which of course is what Tucsa was as well.²⁰

Without genuine worker control, and with a structure that placed the survival of the movement in the hands of a few leaders, Sactu too – in the workerists' assessment – was unable to sustain itself in the face of the jailing or banning of its leaders.²¹

The ICU was also castigated for its failure to organise the nucleus of workers in towns, and sounded a warning against the ICU's organisation model of "vague political populism".²² This model was general in character, placed primacy on unaccountable leaders and spread itself across a wide region, mainly in the rural areas. It therefore failed to create a strong industrial base with members organised into strong independent and government-recognised structures capable of withstanding repression.²³ Thus, Bonner argued, the ICU's collapse was to an important extent in fact a "case of self-destruction", caused by weak shopfloor formations, and an unaccountable leadership.²⁴ Tucsa similarly, although not under party leadership, was highly centralised and bureaucratised – as the motor union experience showed – and thus another model that Fosatu differentiated itself from strongly.

Fosatu's commitment to democracy and its distinctive organisational style, was strikingly similar to that of the democratic practices and structures of historic syndicalist unions like the Spanish CNT. (The CNT conversely provided inspiration to many in the New Left.) Here, the power of the federation was based on the factory floor, and thus was as much a means to an end, as it was an end in itself: "I think what was recognised was that, you know, democracy wasn't just an end. It was a realisation that you need democratic organisations in order to

²⁰ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009; See also Ulrich, "Only the Workers"

²¹ Importantly however, the focus on worker control extended beyond these concerns over survival, into the arenas of both theoretical analysis (as has been discussed) and longer-term strategy – which will be addressed chapter 8.

²² Lewis, J. 1991. "South African Labour History: A historiographical assessment" in Brown, J. (ed.) *History from South Africa: alternative visions and practices*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia

²³ See Bonner, P. 1974. "The Decline and Fall of the ICU: A case of self-destruction?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol.1, No. 6; Forrest, "Power Independence and", p. 44; S. Godfrey, J. Maree, D. Du Toit and J. Theron. 2010. *Collective bargaining in South Africa: past, present and future?* Juta and Co Ltd: Cape Town

²⁴ Bonner, P. 1974. "The Decline of the ICU: a case of self-destruction," *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 38-43

build”.²⁵ The idea that democracy serves a clear “survivalist” purpose has also likewise long advocated by representatives of anarchism and syndicalism.²⁶

Of course, the lessons that people draw from historical experiences also tend to reflect their political orientations, and in this regard it is instructive that the lessons of the Sactu experience drawn by Fosatu’s workerists were starkly different to those drawn by the Marxist Workers’ Tendency. Whereas Fosatu stressed the importance of a self-managed, directly democratic union movement as the key lesson, the Tendency saw the problem as Sactu being led from the top-down by the *wrong* party. Led by the ANC, the movement“ was “lacking a revolutionary leadership with a scientific perspective and policy,” and so “succumbed to bitter infighting and division”.²⁷ Rather than attempting to establish a centralised structure comprising revolutionary cadre of professional revolutionaries – the vanguard party solution advocated by the Tendency – Fosatu proceeded to develop a profoundly *decentralised* structure of power in which the real strength of the union was based in the membership, in both the factory committee/shop steward structures, and within the shop stewards’ councils or “locals”²⁸ – not in the capacity and talent of officials.

According to Ulrich, the democracy enshrined in the Tuacc worker control tradition represented a break with all existing models – including those of Sactu, Tucsa and the BC unions, none of which displayed the same sort of sincere commitment to democracy as was exhibited by the workerists.²⁹ Fosatu’s Central Committee was a majority worker body, effectively a mini-Fosatu congress, with wide powers over senior leaders. It was, for example, empowered to order the suspension of the General Secretary under certain conditions, thereby ensuring accountability.³⁰ It was even debated whether to permit the General Secretary voting rights.³¹ Furthermore, in order to prevent an unaccountable bureaucracy emerging, Fosatu’s constitution stipulated that the General Secretary, President, Vice-President and Treasurers “shall vacate their seats during their term if they fail to be members of an affiliate”,³² which ensured these positions were filled by workers, rather than

²⁵ Jane Barrett, 26th February, 2010, Johannesburg

²⁶ Van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

²⁷ Storey, P. 1985. “South Africa – How Close to Revolution?” in *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, November edn., p. 12

²⁸ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report – 1982

²⁹ Ulrich, “Only the Workers”

³⁰ HP: AH 1999: C1.8. Fosatu Constitution (as amended at the second national congress in April 1982), p. 17

³¹ Ulrich, *op. cit.*

³² HP: AH 1999: C1.8. Fosatu Constitution (as amended at the second national congress in April 1982), p.10

professional unionists. This also meant that such leaders were subject to a second level of control, by virtue of their membership of a Fosatu affiliate.

The 1980s also saw a running debate over the question of wages for Fosatu employees and other officials like organisers, who were differentiated from office bearers.³³ Many of the workerist “hard-liners”³⁴ argued that “that the union organisers had to earn exactly what the average worker’s wage was”.³⁵ Likewise, a proposal, sponsored by Sauls, to “eliminate the wage gap for Fosatu employees and that all Fosatu employees do all jobs and by so doing eliminate job division was also accepted” by a Central Committee meeting in Wilgespruit.³⁶ This parallels practices common in syndicalist unions, which have historically fought against the entrenchment of union bureaucracies. The syndicalist IWW for example, placed strict limits on the income of officials;³⁷ it even contained an “extremist “decentraliser” faction” that pushed for the abolition of the national office bearers committee.³⁸

The shop stewards’ councils, or “locals”, which brought together workers from various Fosatu structures in local areas, existed informally from 1980 and were formally included in the constitutional structure in 1982.³⁹ They were seen by Fosatu to “represent a further step” in “underwriting workers’ control”.⁴⁰ This led to the formation of various other structures, like for example ““combine committees’ uniting representatives from the various establishments of multi-national companies; and the establishment of shop steward councils for a particular sector”.⁴¹ Importantly, the deep commitment to direct democratic organisation, so integral to workerism, clearly permeated these councils as well, so much so that shop steward council in Katlehong township rotated its elected office bearers annually to “give others a chance and to prevent ‘power-mongering’”.⁴²

³³ HP: AH1999, C1.7.1.1.3. Minutes of the 5th Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held on the 25th/26th April 1981

³⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.1.1.3. Minutes of the 6th Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held 31st October and 1st November at Wilgespruit Centre, JHB

³⁷ Foner, P.S. 1965. *History of the labour movement in the United States: The industrial workers of the world, 1905-1917*, International Publishers Co. Inc.: United States

³⁸ Van der Walt and Schmidt, Black Flame, p. 188. See also Foner, *op. cit.*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report – 1982, p. 17-18

⁴¹ Webster, *Cast in a Racial*, p. 238

⁴² Rees, R. 1983. “Katlehong Removals” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 20

These attempts to entrench democracy into the organisation, in which the workerists played a fundamental role, were at least in part an effort to ensure that power remained with ordinary (mainly black) workers and not in the hands of (almost all white) university intellectuals. Despite this, critics of Fosatu, not least Sactu and the BCM, continually claimed the union federation was undemocratic and controlled by “non-worker bodies” and whites.

In 1979 Bonner wrote an article in response in which it is emphasised that claims of “external influence” by “non-worker bodies”⁴³ are unjustified given that Fosatu “specifically excludes them from direct affiliation”.⁴⁴ In fact, although representatives of these non-worker bodies were entitled to sit in certain meetings, they were denied voting rights, thereby ensuring the control of the union by the workers themselves.⁴⁵ (It was also noted with some resentment by Fosatu figures that the exiled Sactu was run by ANC / SACP *apparatchiks*, including whites, while the UTP/ Cusa unions had a large number of non-worker leaders, like Cyril Ramaphosa, the attorney who ran its miners’ union).

However, such claims continued to be made by dissident factions: how fair were they? This issue can be examined by looking at the most charged case: a 1984 split in Mawu on the East Rand. Although this had little impact on membership numbers, there is no doubt that the split “reverberated... within the union and on the political and organisational terrain”.⁴⁶ The splinter group charged 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”.⁴⁷ In later years, the split has been highlighted by writers like Buhlungu to suggest that they brought issues of power and race into the open, highlighting the “highly explosive” nature of the race issue “within Numsa and its predecessors”.⁴⁸

The picture was rather more complex than such views suggest. The split was the product of the expulsion (headed by Mayekiso) of four leading unionists, including David Sebabi (Mawu general secretary), Andrew Zulu (Fosatu Vice-President), Sam Ntuli (organiser) and Godongwana (organiser and Mawu Transvaal Treasurer), and it was they who subsequently

⁴³ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”, p. 24

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Forrest, “Power, Independence and Worker Democracy”, p. 16

⁴⁷ Ummawusa leadership cited in *Work in Progress*. 1984. “Mawu and Ummawusa: Fight for the factories”, No.

33

⁴⁸ Buhlungu, “Democracy and Modernisation” p. 185

set up the breakaway United Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (Ummawusa). The expulsion followed the discovery of misuse of union funds by Sebabi and Zulu. Fosatu figures, including leading African and Coloured figures, insist that charges of white domination were simply an exercise aimed at diverting attention from Zulu and Sebabi's corruption.⁴⁹

Mayekiso "believed that this faction employed the racist argument dishonestly"⁵⁰ claiming that "Racism was not a factor in the union; it was a factor in corrupt individuals".⁵¹ Godongwana, who reconciled with Mawu, later stressed that Sebabi fostered tensions in Mawu "as a cover for the investigation" around his corruption.⁵² Foster also remembers the incident, insisting that feeling of white domination was not prevalent in Fosatu:⁵³

This bloke [Sebabi]... what was happening was that MAWU had a credit card issued in his name. He uses the credit card, and the details of account goes [sic] to him. But the organisation just gets an account at end of month, but he has details. So he would table the account from bank, and then organisation would pay, without knowing the details... When Bernie them now raise this in the meeting, then [he] turned around and said "your white officials are trying to run the union ... [Several years later] when Enoch was on the run, he came to the office here in Belleville. So fortunately I still had copies of all these statements [of purchases made by Sebabi for his wedding], so I said to him Enoch sit down... this is what you have been supporting. Look here... And he turned around and he influences you people to say "its white intellectuals" and so on. Enoch was shocked!

To present Fosatu as a deeply racially polarised movement, or to suggest that a small handful of whites could – or sought to – dominate the federation, is highly misleading. Forrest, in her study of Mawu and Numsa, notes that Sebabi tapped into a genuine sense of resentment on the part of certain black worker leaders, which he was able to exploit to his own advantage, but stressed that it is "oversimplified" and exaggerated to see the Mawu split as simply a racial divide.⁵⁴ None of this is to deny, as Mayekiso noted, that racial arguments could gain an audience, and that racial tensions could develop in Fosatu. Given the country's history of racial conflict, and the growing polarisation of the 1980s, it would be surprising if they didn't.

⁴⁹ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

⁵⁰ cited in Forrest, "Power, Independence and Worker Democracy", p. 535

⁵¹ cited in Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 535

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Foster *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Forrest, *op. cit.*

The 1984 conflict in Mawu did, however, indicate that workers' control was not always as well established as was intended. In the minutes of a Central Committee meeting held in 1980, for example, the problem of "weak unions" was identified: as "unions where the link between the members and the Executive is weak and as a result the Executive and officials can protect themselves against criticism".⁵⁵ Barrett likewise noted that "internal democracy was never perfect in the old days".⁵⁶ In part, this was the price of success: Fosatu's explosive growth in the early 1980s also led to a partial breakdown of the "sound democratic structures" set up in order "to control the power of officials",⁵⁷ and so the Mawu split at least had the merit of highlighting problems in the implementation of workers control.

The key point to note is that Fosatu consistently sought to address rather than tolerate such failings. It has been suggested in some accounts that Fosatu faced continual "grassroots pressures that ultimately resulted in the 'ungovernability of union structures'",⁵⁸ or even that the shop stewards Councils or "locals" were imposed from below, as a revolt against the central leadership.⁵⁹ Again, there is little evidence for this speculation: the rise of the shop stewards' councils was an *extension* of the Fosatu tradition, not a break with it.

As Fanaroff notes, the exact causes of the formation of the shop stewards' councils are a "disputed part of history",⁶⁰ the new bodies were welcomed by, and often established, with the help of intellectuals and activists, both black and white, on the Central Committee.⁶¹ The locals were welcomed as a means of *deepening* organisation, especially as the unions grew: according to Fanaroff:

Where the Shop Steward Councils originated was in Wadeville where we had a huge influence and members after the 1980 strikes ... And people were just streaming in, literally in thousands, into our office in Katlehong. And so we said, 'look we can't organise, you

⁵⁵ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.2. Minutes of the Central Committee Meeting, 26th – 27th July 1980

⁵⁶ Interview with Jane Barrett, 6th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁷ Bernie Fanaroff cited in Forrest, "Power, Independence and", p. 537

⁵⁸ F. Barchiesi and B. Kenny. 2002. "From Workshop to Wasteland: deindustrialisation and fragmentation of the Black Working Class on the East Rand (1990-1999)" in Altena, B. and M. van der Linden (eds.). *De-industrialization: social, cultural, and political aspects*. University of Cambridge Press: Britain. See also Swilling, M. 1984 "Workers Divided: A Critical Assessment of the Split in Mawu on the East Rand", in *South African Labour Bulletin*, No. 10

⁵⁹ Ginsburg, "Trade Union Education"; see also Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause"; Von Holdt, K. 1987.

"Trade Unions, community Organisations and Politics: a local Case Study on the East Rand", *Sociology of Work Institute*, Research Report 3. Johannesburg

⁶⁰ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁶¹ *ibid*

know’? And we had very good members in a factory called Henred Fruehauf (they make trailers) so we said to the guys, ‘look you guys must go and organise in other factories in Wadeville – we haven’t got time’. And they started doing that and we brought them together in regular meetings and the shop steward councils developed out of that”.⁶²

Ginsburg argues that these worker-bodies had a significant autonomy, and shaped Fosatu’s political and ideological direction, as well as the direction of union education, previously centred on white academics.⁶³ Thus, he suggests, the locals were a conduit for growing pressure on the federation to throw itself into township politics. Given that the shop stewards councils deepened Fosatu’s democracy, built on Fosatu’s successes, and raised issues about union policy, however, this must be seen as the locals *exemplifying* the Fosatu tradition – a tradition that, as we have seen, never opposed political struggles as such.

Bonner explained that the initial Fosatu caution about involvement in township struggles revolved primarily around limited resources and the attempt to invest energy where it would be most effective, rather than *opposition* to such struggles.⁶⁴ While “there was a sense there that at some point you broaden out – you have to broaden out”, the current state of the unions was not seen to be conducive: “I mean, Christ, we were tiny. You can’t go wafting off into the community and diverting your energies when you’ve got so much to do” in the factories.⁶⁵ Bonner added that the locals showed the predominance of shop stewards in Fosatu activities:

That sort of thing [distancing the unions from community issues] was contested... workers moved themselves through the shop stewards councils, and that... was very creative... I think that was one of the hallmarks of it because in the end everyone could see that the workers called the shots. The intellectuals if you will, or officials, would try to persuade them that that’s the wrong way to go, but that’s the way they were going to go, then that’s the way they went.⁶⁶

Thus “the sort of imperative to sort of take up issues beyond the workplace became almost an organic imperative”,⁶⁷ which was in fact “encouraged”⁶⁸ by the leadership. For Fanaroff, this

⁶² Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁶³ Ginsburg, “Trade Union Education”

⁶⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁶⁷ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁸ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

was “partly because they were important issues; partly because of the debates in the SSCs [shop stewards councils]; and partly for strategic reasons (for example, in one case, to prevent Saawu, a “community union” affiliated to the UDF, from expanding into the Transvaal”.⁶⁹) Baskin also stresses that the fact that in practice, it was the locals that held power at the local level was felt “to be ‘not a problem by the council executive’ because all the local executive committees of the various unions support the council”.⁷⁰ Evidently, then, the notion that a small handful of intellectuals could “dominate” Fosatu is highly misleading.

As I have shown, certainly there were tensions surrounding the role of white intellectuals in the organisation, and certainly internal democracy was compromised at certain points. However, such tensions, where they did exist, arose in part from conflicts over resources *between* leaders, and such conflicts *did not* neatly map into race, as the Mayekiso-Sebabi matter shows, although racial suspicions sometimes played a role. At the same time, it was *precisely* the structures and styles of unions that workerists of all races promoted that enabled real power to remain in the hands of ordinary members, mainly African and Coloured, and that give the lie to nationalist claims that Fosatu was white-dominated.

As Bonner points out, “many of the criticisms levelled at Fosatu do not hold up” because Fosatu “was organised in such a way as to concentrate most decision making an activities in the regions, where workers exercise maximum control”.⁷¹ This is extreme democracy highlighted by the following example: one point of contention that got raised in 1984 Mawu split conflict was the extent to which the unions should be involved in township politics. Godongwana and Ntuli had been influential in the community-based East Rand Peoples’ Organisation (Erapo).⁷² Given this background in community organisation, both men were “angered” by Adler’s suggestions that unions should avoid direct participation in resisting a series of forced removals in Katlehong.⁷³ However, it was *not* Adler who made the final decision to avoid participation. The ruling on the issue of participation in these struggles was taken by the Fosatu Regional Executive Committee (REC), which opposed such steps.⁷⁴ Given that the REC was structured as to ensure a worker majority, this decision *could not* have been not taken by white intellectuals alone; it reflected the black worker majority sitting

⁶⁹ Fanaroff, *op. cit*

⁷⁰ Baskin, “The Growth Of”, p. 51

⁷¹ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”, p. 23

⁷² Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 534

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Godongwana cited in Forrest, “Power, Independence and”

on the REC. Nor were Ntuli and Godongwana “members of the NEC”.⁷⁵

Fosatu participated in political activities, as noted, but not enough to satisfy a growing frustration with the federation: that it could do more, especially as township struggles escalating rapidly in the 1980s. Thus, Dlamini was “in many ways very sympathetic” to the Mawu breakaway, inasmuch as it raised the issue of involvement.⁷⁶ He was “quite close to Enoch Godongwana,” but “wouldn’t align himself with them because he didn’t feel that they had dealt the issue constructively”.⁷⁷ He certainly did, however, tend to see the reluctance to get involved more fully in community struggles as the position of “the white comrades,” “people like Alec Erwin, Bernie Fanaroff, Phil Bonner, and Rob Crompton,” who did not “agree with the position of the UDF”. Many, like himself, “couldn’t understand how you separate community struggles and labour struggles, or worker struggles”.⁷⁸

However, what must be stressed is that, as the Katlehong example shows – and contrary to the interpretation of Godongwana and Dlamini – most of the workerists cautious about the UDF and community struggles, were *Africans*. Dube, for example, insisted that affiliating to the UDF would have meant “getting lost altogether”.⁷⁹ Dlamini himself stressed that workerists were not just white academics:

...this thing of the workerists was misplaced by those who advocated it... that is why in fact after Cosatu was formed... we said... we need to find a programme that we could use to work towards achieving our liberation. And the only programme that is existing... would be the Freedom Charter. And there was a lot of, wow, people like Moses Mayekiso, the late Gomomo, were very opposed to that. But we pushed, we pushed.⁸⁰

Other respondents stressed that the role of race in the Fosatu unions was far less important than accounts like that of Buhlungu suggest. Most reiterate the position taken by Mayekiso that “racism was not a factor in the union”,⁸¹ or Erwin that blacks were “in practice... prepared to accept white intellectuals coming in”,⁸² because they were not racist. Dube

⁷⁵ Godongwana cited in Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 536

⁷⁶ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ Interview with Chris Dlamini, 27th June 2009, Johannesburg

⁷⁹ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁸⁰ Dlamini, *op. cit*

⁸¹ Cited in Forrest, “Power, Independence and”, p. 535

⁸² Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town.

stressed that the white activists enjoyed a high degree of trust, earned through struggle,⁸³ which attests to Mayekiso and Erwin's claims made earlier:

Where I am sitting now, I still haven't come across black intellectuals who have dedicated their time to the struggle of the working people more than the white intellectuals have done. I have not. But I know there are a few, but they are exceptions rather than the norm. So for me, these labour organisations, and the presence of the white intellectuals played a very... what I call a catalytical role. They bridged a gap – a gap of ignorance that they made possible for the people to breach.⁸⁴

The image of a union movement wracked by “highly explosive” racial conflict⁸⁵ does not match the data. Certainly the union officials, including white academics, had a large influence in Fosatu, give their own skills and their role in education, but these same officials must be seen as part of a larger workerist tradition of self-managed trade unionism. Buhlungu has presented an image of Fosatu racially polarised between a new generation of “assertive black leadership” and the old elite of white academics, which was losing its “special status”.⁸⁶

My research supports the argument made by Maree, rather than Buhlungu, that the workerists had already articulated a pre-established and “deliberate strategy... to put control of the unions into the hands of black workers, who gradually rose through the ranks into positions of leadership”,⁸⁷ and that therefore the supersession of white by black leaders was testimony to the success of the workerist project.⁸⁸ Thus, strong black worker leadership was the *goal* of Fosatu, and also in part a *result* of its commitment to ensure that black workers, not university academics, would undertake “the running of the unions”.⁸⁹

However, the continuous misrepresentation of workerism as the ideology of a small clique of white academics, imposed upon an unwilling mass of black members, continues to exist. A recent debate between, on the one hand, Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich, and Sithole and Ndlovu on the other, is instructive.⁹⁰

⁸³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ Buhlungu, “Democracy and Modernisation” p. 185

⁸⁶ Buhlungu, “Rebels without a cause”, p. 436

⁸⁷ Maree, “Rebels with Causes”, p. 453

⁸⁸ Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*, p. 41. Buhlungu does here admit that “some intellectuals had sought to groom a worker leadership”, but he downplays the effect, insisting that these organic intellectuals emerged “independently of these officials”. See also Buhlungu, “Rebels without a Cause”

⁸⁹ Maree, “Similarities and Differences”, p. 47

⁹⁰ See Sithole and Ndlovu, “The Revival of”; Hemson et al., “White Activists and”

Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich were commissioned to write an account of the revival of the black labour movement for the *Road to Democracy* volumes, a project of the South African Presidency. Their paper was heavily criticised by Ben Magubane, the director of the project.⁹¹ After a lengthy dispute, the Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich piece was, despite the vehement objections of the authors, retitled from “The Revival of the Workers Movement” to “White Activists and the Revival of the Workers Movement” – a retitling that effectively treats Tuacc, IAS, IIE and Fosatu as basically white. Meanwhile, a rival paper was commissioned of Sithole and Ndlovu, and placed in the volume alongside Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich. This paper, too, was retitled from “The South African Congress of Trade Unions during the 1970s” to “The Revival of the Labour Movement” – a retitling that effectively posits Sactu as the source of the 1970s union upsurge.

The two chapters, while covering largely similar areas, make vastly different assessments of the re-emergence of the labour movement in the 1970s (which to an important degree centre on the politics of the workerists) – and their race. Sithole and Ndlovu accuse critics of Sactu, including both Legassick and Hemson, of “dismissing the quest for national liberation by the vast majority of the masses as just an aberration in a struggle for socialism”.⁹² Their account centres on seeking to demonstrate that Sactu was the main force behind the revival of the black unions – and elides Sactu’s insistence that open union work was impossible in South Africa, and that the new unions were “yellow unions” allied to apartheid.

As Legassick suggests, such an account must rest upon making demonstrably dishonest and “fictitious claims about the activities of Sactu”, the better to “repress uncomfortable truths in order to present a seamless picture favourable to the ANC and Sactu”.⁹³ The political rationale is key: the reason that Magubane, and then Sithole and Ndlovu, “found it necessary to contest the Hemson et al chapter was because this chapter raised the issues of the political independence of the working class from nationalist orthodoxy”.⁹⁴

The fact of the matter is that workerism, in arguing for national liberation but rejecting nationalism, in arguing for anti-apartheid struggle but rejecting the ANC, in arguing for a

⁹¹ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”

⁹² Sithole and Ndlovu, *op. cit.*, p. 196

⁹³ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”, pg. 241

⁹⁴ Legassick, “Debating the Revival”, p. 242

class-based movement in place of a broad multi-class national front, simply does not fit the nationalist categories of the ANC – and can only be caricatured if viewed through those categories. Rather than “dismissing the quest for national liberation by the vast majority of the masses as just an aberration in a struggle for socialism”, the Fosatu tradition insisted that these struggles be *combined* by a strong, self-managed and autonomous *union* movement. This insistence and vision is an issue to which I will return next chapter, but which has already been discussed to some extent. It sought to work amongst the “the vast majority of the masses”, but *independently* of forces like the ANC, SACP and Sactu, that claimed a monopoly of the authentic politics and ideology of blacks.

For many in the ANC tradition, which views itself as the natural and inherent crucible of African politics, such an alternative project is almost by definition impossible *for blacks* – correspondingly, non-nationalist ideologies like workerism must be seen somehow essentially white. This paves the way for the caricature of workerism as represented solely by whites – and the depiction of workerism as viable only when whites prevent blacks from expressing their natural nationalism through “organic” activists from “the community”. This is the deeper logic that arguably underlies Magubane’s retitling of the Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich chapter in a way that racialises workerism, and the concomitant presentation of a chapter *on Sactu* as a chapter on the black workers movement *as a whole*.

The power of black workerists and workerism among blacks is a body blow to nationalist claims for authenticity – and for the tendentious conflation of national liberation with nationalism. Workerism was, as will be seen in the following chapter, deeply committed to national liberation but critical of *nationalism* as the solution. It advocated – and indeed, to a substantial extent achieved – what Legassick calls “the political independence of the working class from nationalist orthodoxy”. Fosatu was radically democratic in nature, its positions were set by its CC and congresses etc., and it is perfectly reasonable to posit that most Fosatu members and leaders, who were in any case predominantly black, were to a large extent workerist in outlook.

The resilience of workers control and the predominance by shop stewards, and the rise of the shop stewards councils would simply not have been possible had the channels not already been put in place – or had the white intellectuals have enjoyed the power that their critics claimed. Precisely *because* Fosatu structures were built to ensure that workers dominated

decision-making procedures, assertions of “external influence” or “domination by white intellectuals” are exaggerated.

The principle of worker control was a cornerstone and hallmark of the workerist policy and strategy – developed in Tuacc before the formation of Fosatu. The extent to which worker control was entrenched should therefore be interpreted as a measure of the success of the strategy laid out by Fosatu’s central leadership. Furthermore the mechanisms to ensure that the union was controlled by its members were painstakingly built by those who built the federation, of which the workerist leaders, both black and white, were a critical element.

7.3.3. Open and Legal Unions

Fosatu linked genuine worker control to a demand for an “open and legal” unionism: this would enable all union members to participate as fully as possible, a prerequisite for the federation’s achieving long-term goals.⁹⁵ This position was also a rejection of the strategy adopted by Sactu, which involved a stress on armed struggle and on underground work, directed by exiles from outside South Africa. As Fosatu noted, since Sactu “cannot operate openly and democratically *inside* South Africa,” it also “cannot be directly controlled by organised workers”.⁹⁶ Legal status allowed open operations, as opposed to the clandestine politics of Sactu and the SACP, where “selected clandestine people ... pulled the strings behind the scenes”,⁹⁷ unaccountable to the workers they claimed to represent. No doubt this was reinforced by the larger workerist scepticism towards Communism and the Soviet Union.

However it was not simply the matter of democratic worker control that demanded that Fosatu operate legally. For one, Fosatu’s leadership argued that illegal and underground unions would attract the attention of the apartheid state, as the workerists believed had occurred with Sactu, which used its “unions” to recruit for the armed struggle, rather than organise workplaces: “Many Sactu leaders became involved in [a sabotage campaign], mixing ‘underground’ with ‘open’ activities. This gave the police the excuse to attack Sactu”.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 80

⁹⁶ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements, p. 9, emphasis original

⁹⁷ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁹⁸ *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “The Making of the Working Class: Sactu and the Congress Alliance”, October edn, No. 42, p. 5.

Therefore, the achievement and maintenance of a legal union status, and the corresponding tasks of winning legal rights, obtaining formal recognition, participating in statutory industrial relations systems, and finally, widening as far as possible the political space for unions, legally, in a South African context – to ultimately “extend and exploit legality as far as possible”⁹⁹ – were core to Fosatu’s political strategy. This derived in part from the workerists’ analysis of the (apartheid) state, which was seen as internally heterogeneous (creating spaces that could be exploited), rule-bound (enabling legal reforms) and responsive to external pressures and campaigns (as opposed to “fascist”).¹⁰⁰ The notion was that “you work within the contradictions of capitalism” and “take the legal space”.¹⁰¹

This position also differentiates workerism from other left positions, and locates it in important currents in the New Left. For example, Adler counterpoises the approach taken by the Fosatu people in the registration debacle with that of others based in the Western Cape, who often but not always subscribed to more of a Trotskyite view, and who shunned registration. According to Adler, “the very fact that the Fosatu grouping could think about [registering] was an indication of a much more pragmatic approach”.¹⁰²

Fanaroff also alluded to this by claiming that while in the IAS he was willing to undertake the teaching of a law course, despite the fact that it was “really unsexy, and you know, it’s not Marxist”.¹⁰³ He also mentioned that “even though we would’ve called ourselves Marxists, we used the loopholes in the law very effectively”.¹⁰⁴ So, while workerism identified to some extent with Marxism, it displayed a self-conscious readiness to deviate from Marxist orthodoxy; the issue of legality is just one case in point.¹⁰⁵ This is partly, as Adler suggests, the product of its pragmatism and flexibility, but also shaped by the influence of other more reformist currents running through the New Left (see below, on the social democratic strand of Eurocommunism).

⁹⁹ Fine, “Trade Unions and the State”, p. 52

¹⁰⁰ See Ch. 6, section 6.4

¹⁰¹ Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰² Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁰³ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ Of course, not all Marxist schools reject legality. The point is that the workerists recognised that their approach deviated from the standard ones in South Africa.

The emphasis on legality by workerists invoked scathing attacks from various sources, which labelled Fosatu's leadership a "workerist-reformist clique",¹⁰⁶ marked by "Legal Marxism".¹⁰⁷ The latter is a reference to the "Legal Marxists" in pre-revolutionary Russia, who were accused by the Bolsheviks of vulgarising Marxism into a moderate doctrine, acceptable to the authorities – unlike the illegal, revolutionary Marxism of, for example, Lenin's *Iskra*.¹⁰⁸ Thus the SACP: "real Marxism is illegal" in South Africa.¹⁰⁹

In the South African political landscape, in which very basic rights were limited or absent for the majority, an emphasis on legal and aboveground work required of workerism a delicate balancing act. Fosatu was very aware of surveillance, and of the fragility of its legal status, so its political nature was often disguised behind a rather obscure and sometimes deliberately ambiguous façade. Several critics have lambasted this tendency towards vagueness, and clearly, if it confused the security police, it was also the source of much confusion within the left around Fosatu's politics and strategy. For example, Fosatu outlined its political nature and intentions at its 1982 congress, but in a rather vague way. This entailed a commitment to the "political liberation" of workers by organising them into "one movement" so that "an effective organ for change can be created".¹¹⁰ But although "movement" is defined by Fosatu as comprising trade unions, political parties, co-operatives and newspapers,¹¹¹ exactly how (or when) this "movement" (which was evidently larger than Fosatu) would be constituted, or how it would act as an effective "organ for change," was left vague.

Fosatu's leadership certainly took a keen interest in the emerging Workers' Party of Brazil, itself the product of a new union movement, and was even planning visits to Brazil in 1984.¹¹² However, the position of the federation on the question of a "workers party" was never spelled out clearly. There were some hints in this direction,¹¹³ leading to a great deal of alarm

¹⁰⁶ Haysom, "In Search", p. 26-27

¹⁰⁷ Nhere "The Dangers" p. 75

¹⁰⁸ See Lenin, VI. 2005. *The Birth of Bolshevism: Lenin's struggle against economism*. Resistance Books: Australia; Woods, A. 1999. *Bolshevism: The Road to Revolution: a history of the Bolshevik Party from the early beginnings to the October Revolution*. Wellread Books: University of Michigan

¹⁰⁹ Nhere, "The Dangers", p. 78; Nyawuza. 1985. "New 'Marxist' Tendencies", p. 50

¹¹⁰ *Fosatu Worker News*, 1982. "Congress gives a New Lead", April edn.

¹¹¹ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. "The Workers Struggle"

¹¹² See HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report by the International Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984: no page numbers

¹¹³ See Alexander, "Towards a Workers' Party" in which Mayekiso explicitly makes this call.

on the part of the ANC and SACP,¹¹⁴ but there were also denials. This ambiguity is picked up by Plaut, who, in his discussion of the 1982 Foster speech, argues:

If the policy was strong on analysis, it was weak on prescription. Was it attempting to imply that the unions should form a political party themselves as the British Labour Party had been formed at the turn of the century, or as the Workers Party had been formed in Brazil? Or did it merely mean that the unions should ensure that their independence was not infringed by the ANC or any other party?¹¹⁵

Of course, given its emphasis on legality and the facts of apartheid laws, which made support of anything that could be construed as “communist” illegal, being more precise would have invited the sort of unnecessary attention that Fosatu was at pains to avoid. However, such caution also had consequences: if the security police were confused, as were the critics, what of the Fosatu membership? Storey, writing for the Marxist Workers Tendency’s *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, recognised there was a practical element in Fosatu’s ambiguity, but suggested that it was also tied to a degree of confusion in the federation as well.¹¹⁶ For Storey the fact that Fosatu did not “develop their point to any clear conclusion,” meant that there existed “an actual, inherent ambiguity in [Foster’s] position, which has been *carried into practice* in the Fosatu policy towards the UDF”.¹¹⁷

Barrett admits that “fear” was a factor in the workerist failure to develop a long-term strategy,¹¹⁸ which clearly suggests that the concern with concealing political intentions did, in practice, prove quite decisive in constraining real political debate in the federation. In this sense, some of the characteristic workerist “ambiguity” had two elements: repression fostered a politics of camouflage as well as encouraged an even deeper reluctance to the systematic digestion of important questions. The result was that these issues were never properly

¹¹⁴ See Nhere, “The Dangers”; Bonner, 18th November 2010. This concern was actually largely unfounded. Although many agree that the “logic” of Fosatu was a worker’s party, its leadership was nowhere near united on this issue, and it was clearly not on the cards for anytime in the immediate future (See Ch. 8, section 8.4.6). Like many in the New Left, despite the workerist apprehension about the party-political form, it seems to have been plagued by ambivalence in the face of seeing no serious alternative.

¹¹⁵ Plaut, “Debates in a Shark Tank”, p. 398; See also Lambert, “Political Unionism in South Africa”. See also Bendix, S. 1984. “A Brief Overview of the Various ‘Streams’ of the labour Movement”. Unpublished Dissertation, Cape Town

¹¹⁶ Storey, “Trade Unions and the UDF”

¹¹⁷ Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 14, my emphasis

¹¹⁸ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

resolved or clarified, or distilled into a consistent programme of action.¹¹⁹ At the same time, however, as noted before, Fosatu was deeply influenced by the New Left, which had string tendencies towards pragmatism, and against systematic theory, so the ambiguities can also be seen as in part reflective of the sort of fuzzy and muddled politics prevalent in the New Left as well.

7.3.4. Shop Floor Strength

Seeking the locus of power, and organising in that space, has been recognised by many as one of the most centrally defining aspects of the workerist current in Fosatu. According to Erwin “the key about Fosatu which was the difference between it and other union formations, was this emphasis on hard work, shop floor organising; on being able to have strength. And that’s really very, very, very critical”.¹²⁰ This is central to understanding workerism, and the approach described in Erwin’s comment is centrally responsible for Fosatu’s success and explosive growth.

However, it is also an aspect of workerist practice that is slightly more contentious than is often recognised. First, an analysis of the workerist commitment to shop floor struggle is necessary. The basis for this position was the understanding that while the power of the ruling classes was in “the capital of management”,¹²¹ the power of the working class resided at the point of production, on the shopfloor – in its ability to “shut up industry”.¹²² Thus workerism was premised on the belief that “besides the capitalist class”, the working class at the point of production was “the only group of people who have any economic power in a capitalist society”.¹²³ Given this analysis, workerism is premised on the belief “the base of the organisation” must be “located where workers have the most power and authority and that is where production takes place”.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ George Orwell referred to this phenomenon in his 1936 classic as “He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it” (Orwell, G. 1936. *Shooting an Elephant*, available at < <http://www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/writing/Resources/essays/elephant.html>>)

¹²⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹²¹ *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Interview with Freddie Sauls”, p 60

¹²² Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg; HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “Only workers can directly challenge the capitalists” in August edn., No. 40, p. 11.

¹²³ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “Only workers can directly challenge the capitalists” in August edn., No. 40, p. 11.. Hence Bonner’s contention that “to put the prime locus of organisation and the potential for a workers’ society on the factory floor does not seem to me unreasonable - and it doesn’t exclude other parts, although we were slow to pick up on that”. (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg)

¹²⁴ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 28

In Fosatu this was attempted in two ways: first, through the decentralisation of power via the mechanisms of workers' control and the establishment of structures that placed power on the shopfloor (most importantly in shop stewards¹²⁵); second, by channelling the organised power of united industrial workers through direct action as a primary weapon, in the belief that “where the power is... is not across the negotiating table”.¹²⁶

The first of these strategic mechanisms (decentralisation) was partly intended to enable the federation to resist repression thereby avoiding the sort of scenario that led to the crushing of Sactu. This strategy was centred on the idea that if the power of the federation, including the power to make important decisions, was located in accountable shop steward structures, that the state could “take out the leadership and a new one would suddenly pop out of the factories”.¹²⁷

The question of the use of a direct action is less straightforward. Fosatu and the workerists independently consistently highlighted the “efficacy of direct action”;¹²⁸ and so a significant part of the workerist strategy was indeed centred on the use of the organised strength of workers themselves in the forms of strike action, stoppages, sit-ins etc. However, it was clearly supplemented by actions that drew on the skills of professionals – including a highly skilled and left-wing legal team led by Halton Cheadle and well-versed in labour law, able to expose legal loopholes and exploit them in creative ways. This was envisioned as a means to push the boundaries of labour legislation in favour of workers, and was clearly central to the workerist project. As Adler recalls, “how many years did we spend thinking about how you reform the labour legislation, and working with lawyers, who Marx would have seen as parasites and those kinds of things?”¹²⁹ Again this highlights the flexibility and “strong pragmatic element”¹³⁰ running through workerism, and a praxis and strategy delinked from theoretical formulations.

This juxtaposition of direct shop floor action and legal struggle implies parallel components running through Fosatu's strategy: “the law and clever negotiators”, while “never

¹²⁵ See section 8.4.1 in the following chapter

¹²⁶ South African Labour Bulletin, *op. cit.*, p. 60

¹²⁷ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

¹²⁸ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 80. Also see G. Adler, J. Maller and E. Webster. 1992. “Unions, Direct Action and Transition in South Africa in Etherington, (ed). *Peace, Politics and Violence in the New South Africa*. Zell: University of Michigan

¹²⁹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010

¹³⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010

replac[ing]” a strong active and well informed membership, “can only add to it”.¹³¹ A similar sentiment is present in Fosatu’s Organisers Course, which contains, on the one hand, the claim that “as a general principle it is better not to take a dispute to the courts”,¹³² and on the other, that “experience has shown that to depend only on internal organisation within a factory can also be a problem”.¹³³

7.3.5. Strategic Organising

If workerism placed a large amount of emphasis on the strategic position the worker holds at the point of production (the capitalist’s “weak heel”¹³⁴), a similar analysis could be applied to various levels of functioning in a given economy. Every plant contains within it departments that are fundamental to its functioning, just as every industry contains individual plants that are strategic, and as every economy contains individual industries, without which the entire system is brought to a standstill. Fosatu’s workerist leadership, being focussed as it was on “seeking the locus of power”¹³⁵ was quick to pick up on the strategic advantages of this analysis, and organised accordingly.

Adler points out that there was careful consideration about “who we organised and in what areas we organised, both geographically and sector wise”— a decision “predicated on the assumption about who were the most influential sector of society”, and where the weak point within industries sat.¹³⁶ For example, the workerists used ratchet bargaining “very explicitly”, which meant that the union would “find the weakest point” in an industry, get an increase there, and then use that as leverage to force through increases at other plants.¹³⁷

Finding the weak point within the economy or within industries was also applied to individual factories. According to Adler “you would also do that in the factory – so for example in your car factory, the most strategically important workers are the paint shop workers, because if you stop the paint shop you stop the plant”.¹³⁸ This was repeated by Foster, who emphasised the “need to look at the location of our organisational strength in relation to the industry, geographic area and the points at which we can most effectively carry

¹³¹ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.1. *Fosatu Worker News*, 1979, November, 2nd Edn. Trade Unions and the Law

¹³² HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.17.5.3. Fosatu Organisers Course 1984

¹³³ *ibid*

¹³⁴ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹³⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010

¹³⁶ Adler, *op. cit.*

¹³⁷ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹³⁸ Adler, *op. cit*

out collective bargaining”, concluding that “our major affiliates should be located in the major industries”.¹³⁹

Organising strategically often meant that Fosatu focussed its energy deliberately and specifically on multinationals, due to the pressure that cross border cooperation by workers and unions abroad could bring to bear. Similarly, multinationals seemed to be very sensitive to their public image in the international arena, and this could be used to the benefit of workers.

Again, this was one of the important lessons drawn by the workerists from the failures of Sactu. Sactu’s focus on stayaways in the 1950s, rather than organising in strategic sectors, was detrimental.¹⁴⁰ Belatedly, “Sactu itself began organising more strongly in the factories as well as in the strategic sectors like Metal”¹⁴¹ – a move that was applauded by the workerists, and incorporated into their own strategy. This sort of organisational approach was underpinned by both short and longer-term strategic considerations. In the short-term, “strategic” organising clearly bolsters the capacity for victories, and can therefore be fundamental to furthering organisation and capacity, as well as securing rights and benefits for workers. However, in the longer term, having the control of vital sectors of the economy is a fundamental advantage in creating lasting transformative change.

7.3.6. Non-racialism

The principle of non-racialism was absolutely central to, and enshrined deep within, the workerist strategy. Non-racialism was a challenge to the decades-long legacy of segregation of the South African labour movement and society more broadly. As Bonner asserts, non-racial discourse was also important in the sense that it was “home-grown”, an “internal organic development”, that developed within the trade unions and spread out to influence the various other emergent community organisations in the 1980s.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 30

¹⁴⁰ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. Sactu cited in Fosatu Worker News. 1985. “The Making of the Working Class, Part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance” October edn.

¹⁴¹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements, p. 7

¹⁴² Speech Given By Philip Bonner (NRF Chair of History, University Of The Witwatersrand) at Historical Papers Archives Unit Book Launch Of *‘The Future Is In The Hands Of The Workers’: A History Of Fosatu*, 17 February 2011, available at <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/docs/fosatu/BonnerrspeechFosatuBookLaunch.pdf>

This was not entirely new, in that earlier examples of non-racial unions can be found in South African history - syndicalist Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) being a good one. In addition, unlike the racially exclusive BCM and the PAC – the ANC was also formally committed to non-racialism. Although the 1950s Congress movement had been segregated into white, Coloured, Indian and African congresses, these had cooperated closely; in 1969, the ANC opened its doors to all races. It is in this sense that we can understand that workerists like Barrett could declare some sympathy for the ANC tradition.¹⁴³

However, Bonner's point highlights the fact that Fosatu's non-racialism was a powerful challenge to BC at a time when the ANC was still quite weak. For Erwin, it was heartening that the ANC had enjoyed a long influence in South Africa. Its strength showed that, despite separatist currents like BC, "black workers were not racist".¹⁴⁴ This could lay the basis for a genuinely non-racial struggle that could "cut across the ethnically constituted state".¹⁴⁵ It was for such reasons that Fosatu rejected the BC ideology of black exclusivity as "merely another form of racism and nationalism".¹⁴⁶

Fosatu also had an uncompromising attitude to working class unity and solidarity by workerists, which was not simply a principle – although it was an important principle – but also strategically important: since the working class was multiracial, the working class unity expressed by unions had to entail integrated ("non-racial") structures. Only capitalists and apartheid benefited from the racial divisions amongst workers; only a united working class could lift up the conditions of all workers; only a strong working class movement could secure economic and political emancipation for racially / nationally oppressed workers. This did not, then, mean *ignoring* the divisions in the working class, or the specific experiences of blacks because "ignoring the divisions that do exist will not make them go away".¹⁴⁷ At the same time, as we have seen with regard to the 1984 Mawu split, Fosatu was intolerant of people who sought to use race to divide the unions or win personal advantage.

¹⁴³ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁴⁵ Forrest, *Power, Independence and Worker Democracy*, p. ii

¹⁴⁶ Bendix, "A Brief Overview", p. 9. As previously mentioned, Fosatu's non-racialism followed, primarily, from a class analysis of capitalist society (of which apartheid was one variant) as fundamentally structured around the capital-labour relation. Fosatu's class-centred model of society stressed the common interests of all workers, as well distrusted the cross-class alliances promoted by both white and black nationalists.

¹⁴⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.11. Women Workers. March 1984, p. 1

Although in practice Fosatu was comprised primarily of African workers, an attempt to organise workers of different races was evident, and at least partly successful. Fosatu managed to win a partial breakthrough into the Coloured and Indian sectors, which it saw as a crucial achievement,¹⁴⁸ and although only minimally successful, it did manage some organisation of white workers, which was viewed as a symbolic victory.¹⁴⁹

Fosatu analyses of labour history, by figures like Bonner, stressed that a non-racial united working class was a decisive threat to capital.¹⁵⁰ They highlighted the usefulness for capital in re-enforcing divisions between black and white workers, given that “racial prejudice existed” and that “white workers feared undercutting and displacement by blacks”.¹⁵¹

The non-racial stance distinguished workerism from the praxis developed by those who accepted the strategy of BC unions, with their black exclusivity, and Tucsa, with its internal segregation by race. The BC unions’ “rejection of white participation” was presented by the BCM as a “historically evolved” principle, premised on the contention that “only the oppressed can liberate themselves”.¹⁵² Where workerism diverged from this position was in the emphasis that it placed on the intersection of *class* oppression and exploitation with the particularly racist form that capitalism that it had assumed in South Africa – in this sense, race was only one form of oppression, and was itself in large part the product of a prior *class* oppression that cut across race. Thus, for workerism, to organise “the oppressed” meant to include workers *of all races*, despite the relative privilege accorded to white workers under apartheid.

In practical terms, then, Fosatu did not exclude whites from leadership; it merely insisted that white, like black members, be committed to the struggle of the working class, which was, after all, largely black. It also refused to accept the initial Wiehahn proposals, which would have entrenched racial divisions in the unions. Tucsa, on the other hand, initially accepted these racially discriminatory provisions: this is easily understood when it is recognised that Tucsa unions were internally segregated and had long accommodated to apartheid legislation. Tucsa’s policy of “multi-racialism”, and its racially segregated, “parallel” unions were flatly

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁴⁹ Erwin, *op cit.*; Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

¹⁵⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11. Telegram from Phillip Bonner, “The Divided Working Class”

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

¹⁵² Golding, 1986 “BC Trade Unions” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol.10, No. 2

unacceptable to Fosatu; they represented a fundamental barrier to working class consciousness, culture, unity and solidarity. Without these, the strengthening of the organisation and the struggle for a better life for workers, as well as the genuine liberation in the long-term, was unattainable. Thus, “non-racialism” was posed as the alternative to Tucsa “multi-racialism”, to PAC Africanism, and to BC black exclusivity.

7.3.7. National, Industrial Unions

Industrial unionism is a core feature of the workerist strategy. This decision to adopt industrial unions arose formed principally although not entirely from the prevailing economic conditions in which Fosatu found itself. By the 1970s, the South African economy was dominated by large multinational corporations and by giant local monopolies and oligopolies, and characterised by large industrial plants that brought together “large concentrations of workers in huge establishments”.¹⁵³ For workerists the most appropriate response to this situation, and the most effective counter to the power of organised capital, was industrial unionism, organised on the basis of “one union in each major industry”.¹⁵⁴

Despite the workerist stress that the current phase of the South African workers’ struggle was the continuation of the struggles of Fosatu’s predecessors, like Sactu and the ICU,¹⁵⁵ Fosatu also argued that its struggle took place in a changed South Africa. The massive industrialisation of the 1950s and 1960s marked a break with an earlier era, marked by small workplaces, where general unions of all workers – usually based in particular townships, and known as “community unions” –were perhaps more appropriate.¹⁵⁶

By contrast, “populists” tended to favour general unions, usually of the “community union” type, of which Saawu was the prime example. The workerists acknowledged that a case could be made at times for general unionism, Bonner admitting that Saawu’s rise had to be understood in its context. Saawu operated in a confined and isolated area, serviced primarily by one township, Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape, with high levels of unemployment. Here “there was an obvious logic to establishing a general union, to emphasising strong

¹⁵³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth; See also HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 29

¹⁵⁴ HP: AH 1999. C1.1.1. An Introduction to the Fosatu, June 1983, p. 5

¹⁵⁵ Daniel Dube, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*

community links, and ultimately to forming an unemployed workers union”.¹⁵⁷ The township was the key concentration of workers, making it more appropriate to organise the union to include all township residents – who could then act, not through strikes at individual workplaces, but through general stayaways which involved employed as well as unemployed.

Fosatu, however, tended to view “community unionism” as having several problems, particularly in the specific context of 1980s South Africa. First, they did not systematically build strong shopfloor organisation. One result was that they tended to be captured by non-worker, “populist”, elements, to be run undemocratically, and to be drawn into ill-planned campaigns. Secondly, the centralised and monopolistic nature of the South African economy by the 1970s had created vast concentrations of workers at workplaces, which enabled mass movements to be built at work, democratically, strategically, and systematically, movements that could survive the repression of the upper leadership.

Thus, in order to avoid the problems of its predecessors, Fosatu advocated industrial unions as the most appropriate strategy for matching the power of organised capital – itself organised by industry. Several respondents viewed Fosatu’s overturning of the long-standing tradition “of more general unions, of craft unions”¹⁵⁸ as “Fosatu’s greatest success”.¹⁵⁹ Although the 1950s Sactu was organised into industrial unions, its immersion in ANC and its activities and stayaways eroding its workplace structures and made it into more of a general, “community”, union, operating primarily through stayaways enforced on the whole community. Its general strikes became tied to general but unrealistic and unwinnable demands. Its structures became broad and loose union structures, which impacted negatively on accountability, “easily dominated by a few individuals” with no clear constituency of their own¹⁶⁰. Moreover, in “those huge mass demonstrations in our communities... to many of us, myself included, it would seem as if nobody [was] in control”.¹⁶¹

Fosatu also viewed the central weaknesses of the ICU to rest in its loose and general form. Although it mobilised large numbers, it was not organised by industry, or by workplace. Its main activities were mass meetings and speeches rather than concrete planning or systematic

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

¹⁵⁹ Erwin, *op. cit.*; also mentioned in Dube, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

¹⁶¹ *ibid*

workplace organisation. Its membership was scattered across townships and in rural towns, and struggled to pull off actions. Since it had few workplace structures, it was controlled by a few charismatic leaders, many of whom used the unions for their personal gain.¹⁶²

Furthermore, industrial unionism was consistent with Fosatu's appreciation of the power of workers organised at the point of production. Fosatu noted that Sactu itself had admitted that during its 1958 stayaway, "the most effective support came from the organised factories" and concluded "it should concentrate more on factory and industry organisation" – a conclusion that was not however, in practice, applied.¹⁶³ For Fosatu this showed that when "people talk of organising the communities or the unemployed",¹⁶⁴ they had chosen "the wrong place to start".¹⁶⁵

These failures explain for Foster's criticism of other union groupings in his 1982 speech. There he argued that spending political energy on "establishing unity across a wide front" was "clearly a great strategic error that will weaken if not destroy worker organisation".¹⁶⁶ Dube, likewise, explained that having members scattered across industries and factories meant that the power of workers in individual factories and industries was weakened, since their numbers and "necessary expertise" would be insufficient to constitute a significant force.¹⁶⁷

The obvious alternative for the workerists was industrial unions – which laid the basis for tight structures in the workplace, and easily identifiable, clearly mandated worker leaders (and constituencies) who could be held accountable, "allow[ing] workers to elect their leaders in the factory",¹⁶⁸ if something went wrong. Furthermore, industrial unions based in the factories could call *short, directed* actions with *clear* and *feasible* political and economic demands. The failure to recognise that "the action that you choose must be equivalent to the power that you are wielding"¹⁶⁹ would lead to the disorganisation, demoralisation and repression of the workers, and the subsequent decrease in the power of their movement.

¹⁶² Van der Walt, "Anarchism and Syndicalism"; Bonner, "The Rise and Fall"

¹⁶³ Van der Walt, "Anarchism and Syndicalism"

¹⁶⁴ HP: AH 1999, C 1.7.3.16.1.11. "Editorial"

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶⁶ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. "The Workers Struggle", p. 23

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

¹⁶⁸ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3, page. 11. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. "Only workers can directly challenge the capitalists" August edn, No. 40, p. 11

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*

The emphasis in Fosatu was thus “on organisation – very tight organisation”,¹⁷⁰ which was seen as potentially more successful if one was to organise factory by factory. Fosatu, like the Tuacc unions in Durban preceding it, “emphasised building strong structures in individual factories”, in “a few selected factories”,¹⁷¹ rather than “diffusing efforts in a general union of workers drawn from an array of industries in a particular area”.¹⁷² Thus, their emphasis was on “*organisation rather than numbers*”.¹⁷³ For Mashishi, this emphasis on solid workplace structures differentiated Fosatu from Sactu, which, he claims, was organised in “the same way as the UDF unions”, like Saawu, without having “any workplace structures”.¹⁷⁴

The stress on industrial unions and workplace organising was the result of serious debates going back to what Bonner called the “old Tuacc people”.¹⁷⁵ There were “tensions”¹⁷⁶ on the issue however. For example, June Rose Nala, the Secretary of Tuacc’s NUTW, “wanted to do something slightly different” and “be more expansive”.¹⁷⁷ As part of her efforts in organising Richards’ Bay, “in effect... organised a general workers’ union and then broke it up into bits”.¹⁷⁸ However, the official Tuacc/ Fosatu line and almost all Tuacc/ Fosatu union work, was based on industrial unionism.

7.3.8. “Tight” Federation

The workerist tendency in Fosatu was clearly aware of the danger of trade union sectionalism, where “workers will begin to think only of their factory and not of other workers in other factories”.¹⁷⁹ A number of Tucsa unions, for example, were narrow craft unions, and cooperation between unions in common actions was rare.

However, while Leninists have always argued that sectionalism is inevitable in trade unionism, the workerists believed that sectional tendencies were not set in stone. They could be overcome by “close co-operation between affiliates and intensive worker participation at

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁷¹ Webster, E. 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg, p. 232-33

¹⁷² Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 79

¹⁷³ *ibid*, my emphasis

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

¹⁷⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Industrial Relations Under Capitalism, p. 20

regional and local levels”, as well as the sharing of resources between affiliates at the regional level.¹⁸⁰ This was something Fosatu “consider[ed] to be one of its main distinguishing features from other Federations”.¹⁸¹

The workerists proposed that “the divisions in organised labour created by industrial unions” had “to be countered by a strong co-ordinating body”, if there were “to be comparable advances for all workers rather than wide differences based on the nature of the industry and the strength of the union”.¹⁸² The key was a “tight” federation, which integrated its industrial union affiliates into a common struggle, structure and vision. Fosatu’s organisational arrangement was thus structured so that “the regional structures” could bring together workers of unions in different industries “in a wide area... at executive and congress meetings” which would “foster identification with the federation rather than the union, thus lending the federation the character of a large general union”.¹⁸³ The locals, or shop stewards councils, which drew together workers from different Fosatu affiliates into common structures based on locality, often residential, were a key means to secure this integration.

It is notable that the workerists questioned commonly-held accepted Marxist dictums (while often claiming to be Marxist), and this is important for differentiating the workerist approach from the more orthodox and Marxist Left. Drawing from conventional Leninist position, the Marxists group associated with the WPWAB, as well as certain influential IAS activists, were adamant about the inadequacies of industrial unions, and strongly pushed for a strategy revolving around general unions or, alternatively, workers committees.

This refusal to bow to orthodoxy reflected the impact of the concerns and methods of the New Left in two key respects. First, it illustrated the tactical and strategic flexibility to which the workerists, like many in the New Left, subscribed. But it is also significant in highlighting the important influence of currents like syndicalism on the New Left, which has long disputed Marxist critiques of the limitations of industrial unionism – being strategically centred on revolutionary industrial unions.¹⁸⁴ The drive to overcome sectionalism through a

¹⁸⁰ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 3

¹⁸¹ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report – 1982, p. 11

¹⁸² HP: AH 1999 C1.1.1. Fosatu: its policies and objectives, August 1980, p. 3

¹⁸³ Hindson. D. 1983. “Union Unity” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 13

¹⁸⁴ Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*

strong union federations that united workers across industries, was a long-standing feature of syndicalist thought, and exemplified by the old IWW slogan of “One Big Union”.

7.3.9. Developing Worker Leadership

Another core aspect of Fosatu’s strategy, both in the short and medium to long-term revolved around the drive to develop multiple layers of politically conscious, able, effective and accountable worker leaders and shop stewards – and to “allow the leadership to be a serious political force”.¹⁸⁵ This was the central priority and purpose of education in Fosatu,¹⁸⁶ which generally stressed the importance of workers being familiar and guided by the experience of “socialist countries and of trade union movements under socialism” as well as the experience of “trade union movements in Africa”.¹⁸⁷

But Fosatu stressed that its invocation of “leadership” was not about “great men”.¹⁸⁸ Fosatu’s conception of leadership, although it included those who sat on the Central Committee, most of who were workers anyway, was a fairly libertarian one, infused with an ethos of self-management. The real core of the union’s leadership, and the level at which most power was to be concentrated, was in the shop steward structures, and in the union’s local and regional structures, where the shop stewards could exercise decisive power.¹⁸⁹

For these reasons, an enormous amount of energy and resources were dedicated to the training and development of competent shop stewards, who were made almost entirely responsible for the organisation at plant level. This constituted a break with business unionism of the Tucsa type, in which union expertise was concentrated in a full-time bureaucracy based at the union’s office. Power and expertise in Fosatu remained at the factories and workplaces, wielded by the shop stewards acting in turn under mandate from regular worker assemblies.

According to Gomomo, so important was the function of the shop steward, that “all problems” were wherever possible “dealt with by the shop stewards”, so that “no full time

¹⁸⁵ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984: no page numbers

¹⁸⁶ Erwin. 1984. “The Fosatu Education Workshop” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 8, p. 116

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010

¹⁸⁸ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 32

¹⁸⁹ Bonner, “The Independent Unions”

official” need come “to the plant”.¹⁹⁰ Thus, because of the fundamental role played by shop stewards in the organisation, and given its commitment to worker control, Fosatu was centrally “interested in how the leadership is elected or appointed; who it is answerable to and how this accountability is achieved; how experienced leadership is and how it gains this experience”,¹⁹¹ and therefore sought to “develop means of training and educating leadership so that it remains self-critical and politically active”.¹⁹²

The capacity-building of worker leaders at plant level was part of an uncompromising and principled commitment of the workerist leadership to participatory democracy, drawn from New Left and left libertarian sources – as well as from the experiences of ordinary members and lessons of labour historically. It was seen as fundamental in a strategy concerned with surviving apartheid repression in the short-term; building organisation and consolidating worker strength and influence in the medium-term; and a vital component in the long-term workerist strategy which prioritised factory power as a lever for overthrowing apartheid and capitalism (see Ch. 8, esp. 8.4.3 and 8.4.6).

7.3.10. Trade Union Independence

Intimately connected to the policy of worker control and commitment to worker leadership, workerists insisted that workers themselves control the direction of the federation. This was seen to imply political independence and autonomy from all external organisations and political bodies, as well as (as far as possible) independence from interference by international labour bodies like the ICFTU, and domineering foreign unions like the AFL-CIO, and of course, the state and capital. Thus, Fosatu declared: “The federation makes its own decisions independent of all political parties, or foreign organisations, or governments”.¹⁹³

Fosatu’s policy of independence comprised both short and longer-term components. In the short-term, independence was understood to be an essential *tactical* starting point for the survival of the federation. This position derived in large part from Fosatu’s assessment of Sactu’s disastrous collapse in the 1960s, when it was caught up in the crackdown against the ANC, PAC and SACP and indicative of the seriousness with which the apartheid state

¹⁹⁰ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1985. “Interview: Union Organisation in Volkswagen”, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 71

¹⁹¹ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “the Workers’ Struggle”, p. 32

¹⁹² *ibid*

¹⁹³ See *Isisebenzi*. 1797. “What does Fosatu Stand For?” July edn.

regarded what it understood to be “political” unionism. Because it was recognised that “political affiliation under the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act would be an offence”,¹⁹⁴ Fosatu’s leadership was careful not to jeopardise the future of the embryonic worker movement by contravening its precarious legal status, as had occurred in Sactu’s case.

For Fosatu, it was Sactu’s outward association with the “political” nationalist movement, that allowed it “to be smashed by the State”,¹⁹⁵ and thus the effort to “protect of the union”¹⁹⁶ required that it remained aloof from “political” movements to which the state perceived to be hostile. According to Foster, it was decided that only “once we have [a] strong solid base... then we can motor from there, then we can start making counter noises, you know, because we can’t be smashed”.¹⁹⁷ However, Fosatu’s critique of Sactu’s alliance also had *longer-term strategic implications*, many of which were formulated in response to the failures of Sactu in the 1960s.

7.4. Conclusion

Workerists developed a fairly sound short-term strategy, designed to enable the federation to *resist* repression on the one hand, and *escape* it on the other – the lessons for which were often drawn from the failures of Fosatu’s predecessors, notably Sactu and the ICU. For these ends, workerists developed a strategy combining non-racial, national, industrial and strategically placed unions, organised into a “tight federation” which pooled resources and shared policies. Workerists argued that strong organisation was the basis for – and was reinforced by – successful struggles for immediate gains by members intimately involved in an identifying with the union as their own, which was necessarily facilitated by autonomous, democratic, worker controlled and open, legal unionism.

Aspects of this strategy reflect a significant Marxist influence; however, within it is simultaneously a remarkable willingness to *challenge* Marxist doctrine and *embrace* diverse influences and ideas, and thus strategically and tactically flexible. This should be understood as an aspect of the pragmatism and eclecticism of the New Left – where orthodoxy was often ignored and influences wide-ranging and varied.

¹⁹⁴ Bonner, P. 1983 “Independent Trade Unions”, p. 18

¹⁹⁵ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “The Making of the Working Class, part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance”, October edn.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

Chapter 8

8. In the Long-Term: Quasi-Syndicalism or Social Democracy?

"I think that it's a huge weakness of the whole movement historically. So there was this huge disjuncture. You had the orthodoxy of the ANC and very little debate and discussion within that orthodoxy, about the two-stage theory. And then you had internally in the labour movement, and even more generally, you know, some doubts about the two stage theory but not a great deal of discussion about, ok, well if we are worried about this two-stage, what are you going to do about it? And part of it was isolation; lack of access to material; fear, given the treasonable nature of... um... but also a bit of, maybe a bit of a blind faith that as long as you - as long as we all - sort of believed in the transformation at some point that we would find the tools when the moment arrived"

(Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010)

"He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it" (George Orwell, 1936)



Figure 8. Fosatu Education Workshop Poster. 1985. AH 2555/F13.

8.1. Introduction

In Chapter 7 and elsewhere it was argued that workerism was located in a specific historical context and conjuncture, both locally and internationally, and that although local factors were

important in shaping its development – where focus was placed on the New Left. This chapter attempts to analyse and explain some of the longer term thinking present in workerism – while reflecting its historical precedents and context. More concretely, this chapter takes a deeper look at some of the more contentious issues in the literature, such as issues of whether Fosatu favoured the formation of a new workers party, as some have claimed.

It will be shown that, for a range of reasons, for Fosatu long-term strategising was often consciously subordinated to short-term demands and “spontaneous” action. As one workerist described his “strategy”: “take *action, decisive action*, on an issue, irrespective of the consequences”.¹⁹⁸ So, despite the unanimous agreement by all workerist leaders on the desirability and necessity of putting an end to both capitalism and apartheid, Fosatu’s workerists had *no* clear long-term strategic plan in place for achieving its radical ends. Indeed, that question was never fully resolved, primarily because many workerists “just didn’t spend a lot of our time trying to think through things that we saw being not practical at that time”.¹⁹⁹

There was a basic tension between two main approaches in Fosatu strategy; these resembled social democracy on the one hand, akin to certain aspects of Eurocommunism on the one hand and syndicalism on the other. The social democratic strand is to be discerned from the more cautious and piecemeal aspects of Fosatu strategy, which coalesced around a view of the destruction of capitalism as a *process* of winning *reforms*. This included envisioning the achievement of socialism *through* the institutions of the state, in which the possibility of infiltration and transformation of the state/capitalism was deemed possible. In this regard, method becomes important, in that it necessarily entails *participation* and *engagement* in certain state and corporate structures, as a partner – both in the factory (through for example, works councils and co-determination) and the state (the use of the courts and entry into statutory arrangements like Industrial Councils are cited).

Partly because of its location in the New Left, workerism absorbed elements of historical anarchism and syndicalism, directly and indirectly (see below); however, it also independently developed approaches that paralleled historic syndicalism. If workerism had “a

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

left strand... a strong sort of syndicalist strand in the sense of a deep mistrust of party politics, and the idea that the trade union is a political expression in itself, of workers' rights and power",²⁰⁰ its engagement with the historic anarchist and syndicalist tradition was limited and fragmented.

This strand within workerism was similar to revolutionary syndicalism, or anarcho-syndicalism in important respects, but should *not* be misconstrued as thoroughly revolutionary syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist: it was quasi-syndicalist, sharing *some* features with historic syndicalism. Indeed, there was a notable ignorance of some of the core features and ideas of the historic anarchist and syndicalist movement – this generated, I would suggest, a certain impoverishment due to a lack of a thorough, coherent and explicit engagement with that tradition.

Neither of these two central tendencies were fully formed or coherent, and their juxtaposition was often uncomfortable. The long-term strategy of workerism was wracked by inconsistencies and tensions, which ultimately served to undermine the objectives of workerism in the long-term. The workerist failure to deal seriously with theoretical and political tensions, and neglect of long-term strategic thinking, led workerism to be marked by on-going strategic ambivalences: between, for example, pursuing worker control versus worker self-management; counter-power versus co-determination; between advocating direct action versus legal action; in its advocacy of unions versus parties; and in a strategy that vacillated between reform and revolution.

A key reason for this focus on immediate issues to the neglect of long-term perspectives was the New Left influence on the workerists – influences that I have demonstrated in previous chapters. Lynd suggested that “the single most characteristic element in the thought-world of the New Left”: “the existential commitment to action, in the knowledge that the consequence of action can never be fully predicted”.²⁰¹ In fact this was not quite a shared element, as Lynd claimed, given that the New Left also had a large Marxist-Leninist wing. However, Lynd was quite correct to stress the importance of an action-oriented praxis for many New Leftists. In fact, even many in its Marxist-Leninist wing were attracted to Maoism and the like *because*

²⁰⁰ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg. This affinity has been noted by some studies: for example, Gordon, “The Influence of Syndicalism”

²⁰¹ Lynd, S. 1969. “The New Left” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 382, p. 64.

these strands seemed more dynamic, and with more immediate prospects of militant struggle, than the Soviet-linked Communist Parties. Similarly, “there was a very deep belief, across the spectrum of leadership and ideology in Fosatu that people saw empowerment in action”.²⁰²

There were other factors as well. According to Barrett, the explanation resides partly in “isolation, lack of access to material, fear... given the treasonable nature” of talking about politics, but it was also linked to “a bit of blind faith”, that “as long as we all sort of believed the transformation at some point that we would find the tools when the moment arrived”.²⁰³ Thus contextual factors played an important role, but were reinforced by the action-ethos in much of New Left thinking.

This approach had important consequences for the long-term project of workerism, as was recognised by several critics in the 1980s. For example, writing for *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, Storey argued that “we believe that the militant workers in these unions have not yet thought through to a conclusion the *strategic problems* facing the working class in the coming revolution”.²⁰⁴ This observation was largely correct and admitted and confirmed by most workerists I interviewed.²⁰⁵ Importantly, the outcome of this strategic deficiency (typical in the New Left) was embodied, as this chapter will show, in the presence of inconsistencies and contradictions in what longer term strategic thinking did exist in workerism, expressed in ambivalent actions which were at once libertarian and more statist, revolutionary and reformist, spontaneous and premeditated, “boycottist” and “engagist”.²⁰⁶ This is consistent with disjunctures in workerism described earlier – both between theory and practice, and with regards practice on different issues.

8.2. Long-term Aims and Objectives of Workerism

Fosatu, as I have shown, was far from the “economistic” or moderate union its detractors suggested. Its immediate practice was radical, and its primary long-term aims even more

²⁰² Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg, my emphasis

²⁰³ Barrett, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁴ Storey, P. 1984. “Trade Unions and the UDF” in *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, November issue, p. 13, emphasis original

²⁰⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg; Barrett, *op. cit.*; Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

²⁰⁶ Also see Storey, “Trade Unions and the UDF”, p. 14

ambitious and transformative: “the end to apartheid and the end to capitalism”.²⁰⁷ Certainly, “it was not a bread and butter organisation”.²⁰⁸ This radical societal change was necessary, argued the workerists, because the “madness” of the capitalist system, in which “there is so much work to be done” and “so many willing hands to do this work”, but “it lies undone and we sacrifice the needs and lives of workers so that a few can make profits”.²⁰⁹ Apartheid, naturally, was likewise completely unacceptable: it served the interests of capital, divided the working class, and generated severe racial/national oppression for the majority of the working class.

In place of apartheid and capitalism, Fosatu advocated “economic and political justice for all”²¹⁰ and “a just and fair society controlled by workers”.²¹¹ At times, Fosatu made clear-cut references to the future, such as, for example, the desirability of universal franchise,²¹² with the concomitant view that “you’ve got to have a state”.²¹³ It also stressed democratic decision-making and support for a democracy based on “one man one vote and majority rule”²¹⁴ – which required at the very least “an end to all apartheid laws and the establishment of a constitution that protects people irrespective of sex, colour and creed”.²¹⁵

At the same time, despite this, workerism disapproved of the hollow democracy enshrined in bourgeois liberal doctrine.²¹⁶ It spoke of a state, yet suggested something very different to the traditional state: it would be decentralised and accountable with considerable control and power residing in the organisations of ordinary people.²¹⁷ The new society was to be characterised by a situation of “generalised worker power”²¹⁸ with “workers in control of their own destiny”.²¹⁹ Thus for Dube “liberation meant having a voice in the wealth that you are

²⁰⁷ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁰⁸ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

²⁰⁹ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.11. “Editorial”

²¹⁰ *ibid*

²¹¹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 2

²¹² HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983, p. 12

²¹³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

²¹⁴ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983, p. 12

²¹⁵ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. “Interview with John Gomomo” in *Fosatu Worker News* Feb/Mar 1985, No. 65/36

²¹⁶ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. “The Hungry Search for Profit” in *Fosatu Worker News* Feb/Mar 1985, No. 65/36

²¹⁷ Interview with Jane Barrett, 21 February 2010, Johannesburg

²¹⁸ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

²¹⁹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 6

creating and also benefitting from that... how it is created, how it is used for the benefit of all the people”, which suggested that the struggle “would be for the control of the country”.²²⁰

For Barrett, this required the “transformation of society *as a whole*: economic transformation, social and political transformation”,²²¹ a transformation that would be centred on the principle that “wealth should be democratically produced and equally distributed”.²²² Dube added a critique of the South African war industry as illustration – where workers, despite their opposition to the apartheid army’s on-going role in the war in independent Angola, where it backed conservative forces, were producing the weapons to be used against the progressives there.²²³ Most importantly, the workerists insisted that “no group of people are going to sit in an office and issue instructions to workers”.²²⁴ Likewise, “the workers themselves must decide” when to form alliances and under what conditions.²²⁵

These formulations, then, had an ethos of radical democracy and social justice, and plainly implied some sort of direct self-management and democratic planning of the economy. Yet what exactly would this look like? Fosatu formulations for an alternative South Africa were vague in spelling out its concrete forms – and therefore, also somewhat vague on how these goals were to be achieved. As Adler and Webster noted, “it is difficult to label the emerging unions’ economic vision, in part because they never publicly advocated one”.²²⁶

Therefore, although the workerist current was clear about what it was *against* – capitalism, apartheid subjugation and bureaucratic, authoritarian Soviet-style “socialism” – it was less clear about what exactly it was *for*, bar some general principles, and an impressive – yet far from concrete – vision of democracy. If “no group of people are going to sit in an office and issue instructions to workers”, where and how would decisions be made? Through the unions? Through a party? Through *soviets*? Through municipalities or parliaments with “worker representatives”?

²²⁰ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle, p. 6

²²¹ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg my emphasis

²²² HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983, p. 12.

²²³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

²²⁴ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1980 “Interview with Freddie Sauls”, p. 61

²²⁵ Fosatu cited in *Social Review*, 1983. December edn., p. 4

²²⁶ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 101

This commitment to democracy is important in distinguishing workerism from mainstream Marxism, which is generally silent on issues of self-management, intrinsic human rights, democratic process – and specifically political pluralism and the right to dissent – in post-capitalist society. This is indicative of the impact on workerism, direct and indirect, of the various libertarian currents on the New Left.

Yet, of the New Left it has been argued that “there was little vision ... of a world freed of the most fundamental capitalist institutions and power relations such as wage slavery and all kinds of cops and prisons, *although in a nebulous and palpable way this was all there*”.²²⁷ This was evidently true for workerism as well:

How you expressed this all in terms of a theory of society, or future society? ... You know, it’s very difficult. People did not think about that at all, I would argue, in any serious way until the mid-1980s.²²⁸

Only in the mid-1980s was there something of a shift. For example, *Fosatu Worker News* in 1985 noted, “Speaking about the crisis of apartheid, Brother Copelyn said it was time that organised labour started to formulate its own demands as to what future society they would like to see”.²²⁹ However, by the stage Fosatu was deep in the negotiations that led to the formation of Cosatu, and so, Fosatu itself never formulated “its own demands” in this regard. This silence necessarily resulted in its *failure to develop a long-term strategic plan* for its achievement, and this derived in part from the exigencies of South Africa’s political landscape, but also from the New Left and “present-tense” pragmatic politics and praxis that emerged out from it:

Questions about the future, partly for tactical reasons (because it was dangerous; it would get you into trouble and threaten the movement, which was very, very frowned upon), and secondly it was seen as... rather like Marx did, you know, “cookbooks for the future” and so on - people didn’t really think about that.²³⁰

²²⁷ Carr, “Afterword”, p. 231, my emphasis

²²⁸ See HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3.

²²⁹ “2400 textile members lose jobs over past year” in *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, No. 42, page. 3

²³⁰ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg. A similar sentiment was also expressed by Jane Barrett – in asserting that the form of the “dictatorship” was never really spelled out by Marx (Interview, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg).

This reading of Marx is, of course, a very particular reading of Marx, infused with what Caute has called a tendency to stress autonomy, spontaneity and self-activity without “the fetters of programmatic orthodoxy”.²³¹ In fact, Marx’s political career and key statements, among them the *Communist Manifesto*, show he had a clear recipe for the future, which revolved around nationalisation of the economy and central planning, via the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx stressed, “the proletariat can only act as a class by turning itself into a political party”, and that this Communist Party must aim at the “conquest of state power” to create a “proletarian dictatorship” based upon “centralisation” and “force”.²³² The Bolsheviks rejected “the workers’ right to elect representatives above the Party”, because the party was “entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy”.²³³

As noted, the Marxist Workers Tendency criticised workerism for a failure to tackle the “strategic problems facing the working class in the coming revolution”.²³⁴ The SACP also noted this, arguing in the *African Communist* that workerism was marked by a naïve “worshipping of the ‘spontaneity’ of the working class movement and defence of its ‘purity’” which it claimed were “characteristic of the thinking of some intellectuals working in the independent trade union movement”.²³⁵ One does not have to accept the other SACP arguments to accept that this point was accurate. As Sauls said, “we had that feeling about the direction we were going”,²³⁶ and therefore that “you don’t have to work through the details”.²³⁷

²³¹ Caute, *The Year of the Barricades*, p. 26. This logic was taken to its extreme conclusion by the wing of the New Left that developed what became post-structuralist theory, rejecting all “totalising theories” and “grand narratives” – which obviously included programmes of action but also, in some cases, meant opposition to permanent, fixed organisations with set procedures, aims etc., in favour of an entirely spontanist conception of change that required no political prescription. However, if some workerists were reading post-structuralist inspired work, they did not embrace it to this extent and were often very critical of it. (Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg). The workerist advocacy of tight organisation, its meticulous focus and its painstaking attempts to build strong and solid unions is also testimony to this. However, the central thrust exhibited by the New Left towards spontaneity and autonomy – and away from prescriptive politics, is very clearly apparent.

²³² Marxist resolutions at the 1872 conference of the First International: see Hans Gerth, ed. 1958, *The First International: Minutes of the Hague Conference of 1872*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 216-17, 285-86

²³³ Quoted in Nove, A. 1990. *Studies in Economics and Russia*. :New York: St. Martin's Press. p. 181

²³⁴ Storey. P. 1984. “Trade Unions and the UDF” in *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, November issue, p. 13, emphasis original

²³⁵ Nhere, “The Dangers” p.79

²³⁶ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

²³⁷ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2010, Johannesburg

Workerism also paralleled a New Left tendency to present itself more as a *critique* than as *alternative*. After years in which theory and appropriate action were prescribed by the SACP, and in which sole legitimacy was afforded to the Soviet model, many responded by rejecting *all* formulaic, programmatic and predictive politics, and not just those of mainstream Communism. To speak of the future in any significant way was seen as opening the door to dogma – and so, even to dictatorship (the shadow of the Soviet Union, where one party set the “line” for society, hung heavily). A reluctance to prescribe the future was not the invention of the New Left, but it assumed an unprecedented centrality for a large section of the New Left. This stress on action and critique, rather than careful theory and strategy with concrete alternatives, remains, it may be noted, common today in large parts of the “Seattle Generation”: they are clear on what they are *anti-* (anti-globalisation, anti-capitalism, anti-WTO), but it is far less clear on what they are *for*.

With the benefit of hindsight many workerist leaders view this as the fundamental weakness of workerism. Similar conclusions have been drawn about the New Left more generally. Young posits that the most important factor in the decline of the New Left was “the significance of the New Left’s theoretical inadequacy... because of the non-recognition of, or inability to cast off, the *intellectual dominance of pragmatism and empiricism*”.²³⁸ Workerism was therefore seemingly very much a product of its time – strengths and weaknesses alike.

8.3. Quasi-Syndicalism or Social Democracy?

This approach does not mean that it is not possible to detect patterns in the application of workerist politics: in the sections that follow, I suggest that it is possible to identify two main strands in workerist strategy – a quasi-syndicalist strand and a social democratic strand. These constitute a division in strategy that generated on-going ambivalences and tensions on a wide range of issues.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, the New Left was not a coherent movement, but rather a “broad church” comprising many elements, which could possess a wide range of characteristics at any given time. Workerism was also decisively eclectic, and it had both a statist tendency and a more resolutely libertarian socialist tendency. This was often explicitly

²³⁸ Young, cited in Henderson, J. 1978. “An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left” in *Sociology*. Vol. 12, p. 381, emphasis mine

recognised: workerists noted in their current “a left strand... a strong sort of syndicalist strand”,²³⁹ however, the workerist appropriation of the insights of this libertarian tradition were contradictory and fragmentary, existing alongside ideas drawn elsewhere. So, alongside these libertarian currents ran a more cautious and statist strategy centred on more traditional institutions, requiring less thoroughgoing and less radical change. Although there are important differences, the latter can in some ways be likened to the piecemeal Eurocommunist strategies of the French (PCF), Italian (PCI) and the Spanish (PCE) Communist Parties, to which workerism undoubtedly took some inspiration.²⁴⁰ For Webster, the “big difference” between Eurocommunism and workerism relates to the fact that workerism was a “grassroots” and “labour-led project” emphasising “accountability at the shop floor level”.²⁴¹ Thus contrary to workerism, Eurocommunism centres on “contesting parliamentary power”,²⁴² which was according to Webster “really not the issue for us”.²⁴³ Yet Webster also notes that there were, despite these differences, some important affinities between the workerist strategy and Eurocommunism, which will be explored in the following sections.

I therefore describe the overall long-term strategic approach of workerism as straddling the divide between quasi-syndicalism on the one hand: a revolutionary, libertarian politics, incorporating syndicalist influences and approximating historic syndicalism in important ways; and social democratic plans for gradual transition on the other. In other words, workerism can be described as containing a strong quasi-syndicalist impulse alongside in Eurocommunist-type aspirations for gradual and piecemeal, yet systematic, transformation through reforms rather than revolution.²⁴⁴ This means that at any given moment, the workerist praxis contained components analogous to both of these traditions, while never fully reconciling them into a coherent strategy.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg. This affinity has been noted by some studies: for example, Gordon, “The Influence of Syndicalism”

²⁴⁰ Gordon, “The Influence of Syndicalism”

²⁴¹ *ibid*

²⁴² *ibid*

²⁴³ *ibid*

²⁴⁴ Indeed, despite the divergent nature of these doctrines, it would not be inconsistent for a workerist to understand these traditions as essentially continuous and compatible.

²⁴⁵ Importantly, I am not suggesting that the workerist strategy was modelled by consciously combining insights from these doctrines. Rather, I have used this analogy in order to highlight the contradictory elements in the long-term strategic thought of the workerist current – although influences are also acknowledged.

Given that Gramsci provided a key reference for many workerists, it is worth noting that his *own* contradictory and shifting views could be read as supporting a quasi-syndicalist strategy as well as a more statist, social democratic approach, or in support of Marxism-Leninism. I am *not* discussing here which Gramsci was the “real” Gramsci, but rather, looking at how Gramsci has been *used* in various contexts. Gramsci was continually cited as a key influence on the long-term workerist strategy, but also as inspiration for very diverse approaches.²⁴⁶ For Bonner, “Gramsci came in two forms, and... there were different dimensions to Gramsci”.²⁴⁷ The first and most influential Gramscian “form” for the workerists was the Gramsci of “the factory councils – with a certain kind of scepticism of a certain kinds of politics and political groups”.²⁴⁸ This Gramsci’s ideas were close to syndicalism and council communism.

The later Gramsci, a leading member of the PCI by contrast stressed the struggle for ideological and political hegemony, led by a political party, “the modern prince” in reference to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. While the later Gramsci’s ideas were originally tied closely to the classic PCI of Togliatti of the 1920s and 1930s, and to orthodox Marxism-Leninism, his distinction between a war of position (gradual struggles) and a war of manoeuvre (a revolutionary rupture) was later used by the Eurocommunists in the 1970s and 1980s in a different way. The Eurocommunists now argued that the struggle in the West was a war of position, of gradual change, an approach that effectively boiled down to social democracy. Thus, the early libertarianism of Gramsci was subsequently supplanted in his thought by Leninism, and then his Leninism was re-read as inspiration for gradualist Eurocommunist strategies in Western Europe:

In the late ‘50s in Italy, Gramsci, the theorist of council democracy, was counterpoised to Gramsci, a new type of Leninist, in the wake of the fissures opened up on the left by the events of ‘56... Gramsci in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s became a reference point for discussion in the English speaking New Left... In 1968 the revolt against authority of the established Left included an attempt to reclaim Gramsci from the Togliattian tradition, but this was mainly obscured by reference to the ‘classics’ of Lenin and Marx and to the Mao of the Cultural Revolution. It took... the emergence of Eurocommunism for 1977 to signal the beginning of a wave of interest in Gramsci.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁴⁷ Bonner, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁸ Bonner, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁹ Showstack Sassoon, A. 1988. “The Gramsci Boom Continues” in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 26

These multiple readings of Gramsci could be argued to exemplify the eclecticism and paradoxes of the New Left (and workerism) in terms of long-term strategy. The debates and conceptualisations outlined in the following sections will be used to elaborate on this theme.

8.4. Elements of Workerism

8.4.1. Worker Control vs. Worker Self Management

The term “worker control” is an ambiguous one. “The term is so general, all-embracing and has such wide appeal that politicians of all shades of opinion prefer to pay lip service to it”,²⁵⁰ including “people as different as Young Liberals and labour ‘lefts’, tired trade union officials and ‘Trotskyists’ of one kind or another – not to mention anarcho-syndicalists and ‘libertarian Marxists’,” who “all talk about workers’ control”.²⁵¹ According to Hyman the “traditionally precise” use of the term, and the way it will be used here, is that which denotes “the *limitation* by workers of managerial autonomy; the surveillance and even obstruction by workers as *subordinates* of the decisions taken by a management which retains ultimate sovereignty”.²⁵² “The situation in which workers themselves possess sovereignty and collectively *initiate* all decisions in respect of production – in looser usage referred to as ‘workers’ control’”, according to Hyman, “is more precisely classified as ‘workers’ management’”²⁵³ (The concepts of worker control and worker-self-management are not necessary mutually exclusive: for Munck, the latter is the natural extension of the former).²⁵⁴

Officially in Fosatu, the term “worker control” had “quite a narrow meaning - it meant workers’ control over the union, it meant that shop stewards should be accountable; that they should be directly elected – it was a very specific idea”.²⁵⁵ This was ensured through a structural arrangement whereby workers dominated at all levels of the federation, thereby ensuring that decisions were taken *not* by full-time officials alone, but by a *majority* of *elected, recallable* delegates.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the number of permanent officials was limited,

²⁵⁰ Coates, K. and Topham, T. 1972. *The New Unionism*. Peter Owen: London, p. 39-40

²⁵¹ Brinton, M. 1970. *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control 1917 to 1921*. Solidarity: London, p. 1

²⁵² Hyman, R. *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*. Pluto Press Ltd: London, p. 46

²⁵³ *ibid.* See also Horvat, B, M. Makorvic and R. Supac. 1975. *Self-Governing Socialism: A Reader*, International Arts and Sciences Press: New York

²⁵⁴ Munck, 1989. *The new international labour studies: an introduction*. Zed Books: London

²⁵⁵ Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁵⁶ See Baskin, *Striking Back*; also Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”

and the “president and national office bearers” were actually “constitutionally required to be full time shop floor workers”.²⁵⁷

This “workers’ control” was further entrenched by a routinised system of mandates, and the extensive use of shop steward structures: elected shop stewards were the core basic leadership in the unions, and were, in turn, directly and continually accountable to mass assemblies. According to Fanaroff: “We insisted that shop stewards must meet with their departments at least once a week, and there must be a general meeting at every factory at least once a month,”²⁵⁸ in which shop stewards reported back to their constituencies. Thus, for Fosatu, an active, well informed and confident membership and sophisticated, politically conscious and accountable multi-layer leadership, centred on the grassroots’ structures, was essential for a genuinely worker-controlled movement. Fosatu’s leadership placed this imperative right at the federation’s organisational epicentre.²⁵⁹

However, for most workerists, the concept of worker control *went beyond* a concern for democratic practices in the trade union. Although not developed into a coherent strategy for transformatory change, the call for “workers control” was *simultaneously* a call for the democratisation of the production process itself,²⁶⁰ a process by which workers “build up” their organisation so that they “can control the employers”,²⁶¹ with a view to “wrest arbitrary control from the company’s management on the shop floor”.²⁶²

This aspect of the Fosatu strategy was at times formally stated. It was emphasised by Foster in 1982: “the structures we are developing are an essential basis for effective and democratic organisation and are the basis for greater worker participation in and control over production”.²⁶³ Likewise, Fosatu was concerned to spread the sphere of control of workers: “the struggle for control needs to take place at every level, from factory to the international”.²⁶⁴ Webster even differentiates between the various forms of power that

²⁵⁷ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory” p. 79.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

²⁵⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.1 ‘What does Tuacc Stand For?’ in Fosatu Worker News, October 1979

²⁶⁰ Interviews with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg; Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

²⁶¹ Baskin, J. 1982, “Growth of a New Worker Organ – The Germiston Shop Stewards Council” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 7, No. 8, p. 43

²⁶² Bonner, P. 1983. “Independent Trade Unions”, p. 26

²⁶³ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 30; See also Barchiesi, F. 1996. “South Africa in Transition: Scenarios Facing Organised Labour” in *Critical Sociology* Vol. 22, No. 3

²⁶⁴ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Industrial Relations Under Capitalism, p. 28

workers wield that allow them to make advances in worker control, and elaborates on the ways in which these can be used in a strategy concerned with workers control.²⁶⁵

So, workerist appeals to “workers’ control” were both an attempt at maintaining democratic, self-managed unions, and at fundamentally limiting managerial power over production itself. This reflects direct influence from the British Shop Stewards Movement in the 1970s,²⁶⁶ where there was a “sense that the shop stewards’ movement was pushing back the frontiers of control by challenging management prerogative”.²⁶⁷ The drive to “push back the frontiers of control” in this way can be traced back to the British Shopstewards and Workers Committee movement of the 1910s, a largely syndicalist movement.²⁶⁸ Significantly, Hyman republished Carter L. Goodrich’s classic study of this vision, which examined syndicalist Clyde and Sheffield Workers’ Committees during the First World War. Hyman and others like Ken Coates were closely linked to the shop steward movement of the 1970s, and with the Institute for Workers Control,²⁶⁹ and had close links and personal contact with several workerist leaders. The concept of the “frontier of control” was in fact used by figures like Hemson (then of Tuacc) in their own writing.²⁷⁰

The British Shop Steward Movement of the 1970s was a powerful and democratic rank-and-file movement that remained formally unrecognised by employers – and in many cases by trade unions – well into the late 1970s. Like the shop stewards’ and workers’ committee movement of the 1910s, the 1970s movement operated with significant autonomy from the trade union bureaucracy, holding regular meetings at the workplace. The movement and

²⁶⁵ For example, “logistical power” is that which allows workers to “disrupt the production process”, an example of which is when “dockers last year stopped the shipping of stuff into Zimbabwe”. (Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg)

²⁶⁶ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.11 “The Workers’ Story”

²⁶⁷ *ibid*

²⁶⁸ Its classic statement is J.T Murphy. 1917. *The Workers Committee: An outline of its Principles and Structure*. Mayday Publications and Books: Bishop Auckland, UK. Also see Gallacher, W. and J. Paton. [1917] 1920. *Towards Industrial Democracy: A memorandum of workshop control*. Trades and Labour Council: Paisley

269

The Institute for Workers’ Control was set up by Ken Coates and Tony Topham (a Trotskyite) in Britain. It grew out of several conferences on the subject of workers’ control, and was linked to the British Shop Steward Movement of the 1970s. The Institute brought together shop stewards and militant workers to discuss options for workers’ control in the workplace. While predominantly libertarian in orientation, some of the materials produced by it retained an almost social democratic logic. For more, see Coates, K. 2003. *Workers’ control: another world is possible: arguments from the Institute for Workers’ Control*, Spokesman: UK

²⁷⁰ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

democratic structures had been built up over years to exert significant worker control.²⁷¹ Several authors have identified “the autonomy from the central union control enjoyed by shop stewards and the remarkable control exercised on the job by rank and file workers” as “major barriers to productivity growth insofar as they render management's efforts at technical and organisational innovation both more difficult and more expensive”.²⁷² According to Robertson, in certain industries “not only were the vast majority of strikes unofficial, but management had normally caved in within the first couple of days” which meant that “fulltime officials rarely even knew what was going on – let alone being able to put the brake on action”.²⁷³

The movement displayed spectacular growth and militancy in the period,²⁷⁴ involving itself in “widespread solidarity campaigns”, including a solidarity strike by tens of thousands of car workers who joined striking miners, as well as, in the mining sector, “flying pickets” which closed down power stations.²⁷⁵ However, it fell short of self-management in production as shop stewards structures were increasingly accommodated by management – eventually performing a “managerial function of grievance settlement, welfare arrangement and human adjustment”.²⁷⁶

At least some workerists in Fosatu were committed to the achievement of workers self-management. Webster recalled that “the separate idea of workers’ self-management”, where “workers would elect a council and the council runs the company” was “something that I was into”.²⁷⁷ He ran an Honours course at Wits in the 1980s which focussed on the early Gramsci, Luxemburg, anarchism and syndicalism – all of which stress workers’ self management.²⁷⁸ However, there is little to suggest that the majority of workerists were thinking in these terms

²⁷¹ McIlroy, J. 1995. *Trade Unions in Britain Today*. Manchester University Press: Manchester

²⁷² Zeitlin, J. 1980. “The Emergence of Shop Steward Organization and Job Control in the British Car Industry: A Review Essay” in *History Workshop*, No. 10 (Autumn)

²⁷³ Robertson, J. 2009. “Ups and downs of the rank and file” in *International Socialism*, No. 12, no page numbers, available at <<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=515&issue=121>>

See McIlroy, J., N. Fishman and A. Campbell. 2008. *The high tide of British trade unionism: trade unions and industrial politics, 1964-79*. Merlin Press: California

²⁷⁵ Robertson, “Ups and Downs”

²⁷⁶ McIlroy, J. 1995. *Trade Unions in Britain Today*. Manchester University Press: England, p. 103, Trade

²⁷⁷ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁷⁸ For the IWW position, see Bohm, W.D. and W.D. Haywood. 1911. *Industrial Socialism*, Charles H. Kerr: Chicago

in a thorough or sustained way, although self-management was engaged to an extent. As “a product of May 68 New Left”,²⁷⁹ workerism absorbed anarchist, syndicalist and council communist influences, directly and indirectly. These were all currents that viewed usurping managerial control through workplace occupations and self-management as central. Yet, as we have seen, the workerists had a limited and fragmented engagement with the historic anarchist and syndicalist tradition.

For example, Erwin was one of the very few who specifically linked anarchism/syndicalism and major historical movements, like the Spanish revolution of 1936-1939.²⁸⁰ This was marked by an extraordinary and unprecedented degree of self-management of community, workplace and militias, unmatched in West European history, and was, by some estimates, “the most far-reaching and challenging of all... popular movements of the great revolutionary era” that started in the 1600s.²⁸¹ Foster by contrast, called it merely a “co-operative movement”,²⁸² and seemed unaware that it had anything to do with historical anarcho-syndicalism. Sauls called himself a “radical syndicalist” but associated syndicalism with direct action – without being able to identify much else.²⁸³

Nevertheless, Webster admits that there were “strands of anarchist thinking in some of the movements of the 1960s”, and that correspondingly there was “a strong emphasis on workers’ control” where “workers’ self-management was a central idea”.²⁸⁴ Horn, similarly admitted – in retrospect – that there was to a close congruence between anarcho-syndicalism and workerism, but also testified to the lack of knowledge of historical anarchism and syndicalism amongst workerists at the time:

I only came across people who called themselves anarcho-syndicalists a few years ago in Brazil and I asked them what that meant. And they explained the “anarcho” part and they

²⁷⁹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁸⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

²⁸¹ Bookchin M. 1994. *To Remember Spain: the anarchist and syndicalist revolution of 1936: essays by Murray Bookchin*. AK Press. p. 41

²⁸² Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

²⁸³ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

²⁸⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

described to me something that reminded me of our syndicalism of the early days. But I never really read any syndicalist authors.... I mean we regarded it as a circumstantial thing...²⁸⁵

However, the workerists also had a keen interest in historical examples of worker movements and traditions to which they turned for inspiration.²⁸⁶ This was envisioned as allowing workers “to learn from past struggles and to gain courage from those that lie ahead”.²⁸⁷ The structure and intent of the historical examples that inspired the workerists is instructive, both in terms of what was chosen, and in terms of what sort of models we can deem influential. The models chosen were all predominantly libertarian, decentralised and emphasised, in different forms and degrees, workers’ self-management. And because of the importance placed on history by the workerists (arguably more so than on theory²⁸⁸) the significance of these choices for inspiration is worth noting.

One of these was the Spanish Revolution,²⁸⁹ which took place largely under the banner of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, stressing direct democracy and workers-self management. The period saw workers seizing “direct control over rural land, cities, factories, social services and transportation networks”.²⁹⁰ Over fifteen million acres of land (half of Republican Spain) were expropriated and collectivised, and over two thousand collectives were spontaneously put under direct workers self-management.²⁹¹ The collectives formed linkages, and succeeded in modernising, expanding and diversifying production.²⁹² In shipping, rail and trams, and in the steel and textile industries, workers assumed direct control of production, and in many companies one-person management disappeared altogether.²⁹³ In Barcelona, steel workers took it upon themselves to set up educational facilities – according to anti-religious libertarian principles. A popular militia of over a hundred thousand was formed to undertake defence of the revolution.

²⁸⁵ Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg. Horn’s recent material for Streetnet makes extensive reference to Bolivian anarcho-syndicalism: see D.Gallin and Horn P. March 2005. *Organising Informal Women Workers*. Streetnet. <http://www.streetnet.org.za/english/GallinHornpaper.htm>

²⁸⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁸⁷ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Handwritten notes about the Fosatu Labour Studies Course 1984

²⁸⁸ Clearly it was the pivot around which Fosatu’s strategy and education programmes were devised.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

²⁹⁰ Bretibart, M.N. 1978. “Spanish Anarchism: an introductory essay” in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 6.

²⁹¹ Bretibart, M.N. 1978. “Anarchist Decentralisation in rural Spain, 1936 – 1939” in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 3

²⁹² *ibid*

²⁹³ Guerin, D. 1971. *No Gods No Masters: an anthology of anarchism*, Volume 2. AK Press: San Francisco. Also see Amsden, M. 1978. “Industrial Collectivisation under Workers’ Control: Catalonia, 1937 – 1939” in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 3

Two other movements were also recurrent reference points: the Factory Council movement of Italy 1919-1920, and the British Shopstewards and Workers Committee movements of 1915 – 1920²⁹⁴ and 1920 – 1926. Fosatu’s pamphlet on *Industrial Relations under Capitalism* portrayed of these movements as fine examples of workers’ control: “The shop stewards movement in both Italy and the UK was a spontaneous attempt by workers on the shop floor to challenge the way employers organise production in their own interests”.²⁹⁵ According to Bonner, the Italian Factory Council movement “was something very similar to what we were doing, and, you know, we drew some sustenance from that and some ideas from that”.²⁹⁶ Webster also admits to being influenced by Gramsci’s “early stuff – the factory councils”, despite the fact that “they were critical of the unions.”²⁹⁷ Motala recalls having taught the history of the Italian movement in Fosatu workshops, and certainly this movement featured in many Fosatu course outlines and education reports.²⁹⁸ He also recalled the British movement.

299

The Italian Factory Councils were innovative experiments in workers self-management; they were deeply indebted to the directly democratic industrial unionism of Italian anarchism and syndicalism.³⁰⁰ Williams for example notes that Gramsci, in his 1920 report to the Executive Committee of the Third International, “omitted to mention that these actions were either directly or indirectly inspired by anarcho-syndicalists”, that the “council movement outside Turin was essentially anarcho-syndicalist”, and that in March – April that year anarcho-syndicalists “were threatening to cut the council movement out from under him”.³⁰¹ Indeed, contrary to the later myth, the early Gramsci of these years was himself deeply immersed in Italy’s vast anarchist and syndicalist movement: he was “by no means a Leninist: his views were close to anarchism, the key figures in his circle, grouped around the fortnightly

²⁹⁴ Fosatu also published a booklet entitled “The Shop Steward” which included a discussion of the movement during the First World War. (Gordon, “The Influence of Syndicalism”, p. 40)

²⁹⁵ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 *Industrial Relations under Capitalism*. Fosatu Education Series Booklet

²⁹⁶ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹⁷ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹⁸ Telephone Interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

²⁹⁹ *ibid*

³⁰⁰ See Levy, K. 1999. *Gramsci and the Anarchists*. Berg Publishers: New York; Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

³⁰¹ Williams, G.A. 1975. *A Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, the factory councils and the origins of Italian Communism, 1911-1921*. Pluto Press: London

L'Ordine Nuovo ("New Order"), were anarchists, and his then-libertarian ideas had an appeal precisely because of their resonance with Italian popular culture".³⁰²

The formation of the Factory Councils, mainly in Turin and Milan, coincided with widespread strikes and factory occupations involving nearly one million people during the *bienio rosso* (the "two red years", 1919-1920).³⁰³ The factory occupations emerged in the context of a general strike "led by anarchists and the USI",³⁰⁴ the Italian Syndicalist Union, which was the second largest federation in the country. Their significance owed to the fact that "production continued... under the supervision of the factory councils"³⁰⁵ with produce of being pooled and shared out by workers. Moreover, occupied factories were defended by armed patrols, which guarded against state attack.³⁰⁶

The councils were based on a system of which "internal commissions" made up recallable and accountable delegates in each workshop in a factory. The "factory council", which existed alongside, but in co-operation with certain existing trade unions, brought together the internal commissions, representing unionised and non-unionised workers, who were responsible for the election of delegates. Councils were responsible for various functions, and prepared the ground for self-management proper, by undertaking "defence of the rights of labour" and "education of workers", but more importantly, the "preparation for the seizure of power in the factories".³⁰⁷ According to Trudell, by October 1919, two months after the eruption of conflict, 50 000 workers in over 30 factories had been organised into Factory Councils, and by the end of the year that figure had trebled to 150 000.³⁰⁸

The British Shopstewards and Worker Committee movement emerged in the vast industrial complex of the Clydeside in Scotland in 1915. This was a largely syndicalist current in the British trade unions, exemplified by the Sheffield and Clyde Workers' Committees, which sought to foster militant working class self-activity, building up for the occupation and self-management of the workplaces. The movement "found theoretical expression in syndicalism,

³⁰² Carl Levy cited in Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 276

³⁰³ See Cosatu Workers' Diary, 1987, no page numbers

³⁰⁴ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 276

³⁰⁵ Trudell, M. 2007. "Gramsci: the Turin years" in *International Socialism*, 114, available at <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=306>, no page numbers

³⁰⁶ *ibid*

³⁰⁷ McKay Cammett, J. 1967. *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, Stanford University Press: California, p. 81

³⁰⁸ Trudell, "Gramsci: the Turin Years", no page numbers

and it was largely syndicalists who directed and organised the rank-and-file movements that appeared amongst the miners, railwaymen and engineers in the 1910-20 period”.³⁰⁹ Furthermore, the movement was “heir to different organisations within the Syndicalist tradition”,³¹⁰ including the Amalgamated Committees Movement, influenced by Tom Mann, and the syndicalist, De Leonist, Socialist Labour Party (SLP)³¹¹.

The British Shop Stewards’ Movement was a revolutionary, independent rank-and-file movement politically dominated by syndicalism, operating within established unions in Britain in the late 1910s. It emerged in 1915 out of a strike by metal workers in defiance of the union bureaucracy – which condemned it.³¹² Some of its central concerns were the dilution of skilled work, the controls placed on unions and the right to strike under conditions of war and the union bureaucracy’s accommodation to them.³¹³ It aimed to build a movement of the rank and file with a radical programme, which although operating inside the established unions, could act independently where necessary – as the path towards building the “One Big Union” that could champion both economic and political freedom of the working class. Fosatu used similar terminology, calling for “one big union per industry”.³¹⁴

The movement was of decisive importance: by 1919 it had evolved into a formal national structure (operating in England, Wales and Scotland) with a national administrative centre headed by JT Murphy (who was also its key theorist).³¹⁵ It also formed close links with other syndicalist rank and file movements, notably the South Wales Unofficial Reform Committee which worked inside the miners’ union, as well as with the syndicalist IWW, and ran several publications.³¹⁶ JT Murphy, its key spokesperson, stressed that the workshop committees were “the new units of organisation”, from where “we can erect the structure of the Great

³⁰⁹ Woodhouse, M. 1966. “Syndicalism, Communism and the Trade Unions in Britain, 1910-1926” in *Marxist*, Vol. 4, No. 3, available at <<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/history/Syndicalism.html>>. Also see van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*; Van der Walt, 2007. *Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa 1904-1921: Rethinking the History of Labour and the Left*. PhD Dissertation: The University of the Witwatersrand.

³¹⁰ Cl@ss War Classix. 2010. “Editorial Introduction” to J.T Murphy. 1917. *The Workers Committee: An outline of its Principles and Structure*. Mayday Publishers and Books: Bishop Auckland, UK

³¹¹ Woodhouse, M. 1966. “Syndicalism, Communism and the Trade Unions in Britain, 1910-1926” in *Marxist*, Vol. 4, No. 3, available at <<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/history/Syndicalism.html>>. Also see van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*; Van der Walt, *op. cit.*

³¹² van der Walt, *op. cit.* p. 416

³¹³ van der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.* pp. 231-232

³¹⁴ Gordon, “The Influence of Syndicalism”, p. 40

³¹⁵ van der Walt, *op. cit.* p. 442-443

³¹⁶ van der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.* The IWW is also notable for its popularisation of the “One Big Union” slogan.

Industrial Union”.³¹⁷ He insisted that the “territorially constructed State” be replaced with “real democracy” based on Industrial Unionism with the workers’ committee an important step on the road to a “Workers’ Republic”.³¹⁸ The “*ultimate* aim of the Clyde Workers’ Committee”³¹⁹ was “to weld these unions into one powerful organisation that will place the workers in complete control of the industry”.³²⁰

The British experience was, naturally enough, given South Africa’s colonial links with Britain, and the study experiences of many white intellectuals, a key reference point for Fosatu. The strong shopsteward structures generated in British unionism were an important reference for workerist notions of union democracy, and close attention was paid to “criticisms of s.s [shop steward] movements in 1920s related to current Federation structures” in the formulation of Fosatu strategy.³²¹ The lessons of the failed 1926 General Strike were also drawn, and the workerists believed themselves familiar with, and appreciative of, the “entire history”³²² of the British movement. The revived British Shopstewards Movement of the 1970s was also, as noted, a key influence on Fosatu.³²³

There are important parallels between the original British Shop Stewards Movement and the Italian Councils of the Two Red Years: both movements were simultaneously exercises in workers control and self-management, and both were outgrowths of the anarchist and syndicalist movements. Gramsci noted the similarity between the two movements, stating that the Italian internal commissions were “roughly equivalent to the shop steward committees set up in Britain during the First World War”³²⁴ – as have later writers like Hyman.³²⁵ Both were attempts at overcoming the reformism and bureaucracy of large established, orthodox unions, and both saw their function as bringing together the unionised and non-unionised rank-and-file workers through decentralised and democratic structures. The British movement, like the Italian, also had educative function, similar structures, and aimed at being the basis of worker self-management of production:

³¹⁷ Cited in Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*, p. 45

³¹⁸ van der Walt, “Anarchism and Syndicalism”, p. 420

³¹⁹ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 165

³²⁰ Willie Gallacher (chair of the CWC) cited in Van Der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 419

³²¹ See HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.6. Basic outline of Political Follow up course 1985, p. 1

³²² *ibid*

³²³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

³²⁴ Gramsci. A. 1968. “Soviets in Italy” reprinted in *New Left Review* Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 30.

³²⁵ Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*, p. 46

Seeking to alter the constitution of every organisation from within to meet the demands of the age; working always from the bottom upwards - we can see the rank and file of the workshops through the workshop committees dealing with the question of the workshops, the rank and file of the firms dealing with the questions of the plant as a whole through the plant committee, the industrial questions through the industrial committees, the working class questions through the working class organisation – the workers committee.³²⁶

Other historical examples cited by the workerists also stressed libertarian conceptions, including the self-management of industry by workers. These included the “Council Movement”³²⁷ of Germany in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and the 1871 Paris Commune, with the latter being described as the “first experience of workers control”.³²⁸ Similarly, workerists enthused about the early period of the Russian Revolution with its free *soviets*, which Fosatu called “workers councils”³²⁹ These were described as “the main organ of workers democracy”³³⁰) before their subordination to the Bolshevik’s one-party state.³³¹ Other libertarian references included the syndicalist IWW (the 1986 Cosatu diary featured an IWW advert saying “Join the One Big Union”),³³² as well as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, in which the “the workers’ councils and all kinds of revolutionary committees” were highlighted.³³³

The 1985 Advanced Course mentioned the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and Rosa Luxemburg.³³⁴ Readings included Siriani’s *Workers Democracy: the Soviet experience* (which defends the *soviets* against Bolshevism),³³⁵ Carr’s, *History of the Russian Revolution* (which takes a more pro-Bolshevik line),³³⁶ and Alec Nove’s *Soviet Economic system* (which critiques the one party system and central planning, in favour of a sort of self-managed market socialism).³³⁷ All of these books detail also self-management under the initial *soviets* in Russia. Likewise, the course featured George Blazyca’s *Planning is Good for You: the*

³²⁶ Murphy, *The Workers’ Committee*, no page numbers

³²⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. Advanced Course May 1985

³²⁸ *ibid*

³²⁹ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.6 Report by Education Co-ordinator on Political Course 1985

³³⁰ Cosatu Workers’ Diary, 1986, Friday 17th October, no page numbers

³³¹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. Advanced Course May 1985

³³² Cosatu workers diary 1986, Sunday 12th January, no page numbers

³³³ Cosatu Workers diary 1986, Sunday 26th October, no page numbers

³³⁴ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. Advanced Course May 1985

³³⁵ Siriani, C. 1983. *Workers Democracy: the Soviet experience*, New Left Books: London

³³⁶ Carr, E.H. 1966. *A History of Socialist Russia: The Bolshevik revolution, 1917-1923*. Penguin: United Kingdom

³³⁷ Nove, A. 1977. *The Soviet Economic System*. Allen and Unwin: United Kingdom.

case for popular control,³³⁸ which contains a critical appraisal of central planning, argues for self-management, and cites Solidarność in Poland as an example of real workers control. Solidarność, another quasi-syndicalist union, emerged in the late 1970s, and again, like Fosatu, operating in a late industrialising country under authoritarian conditions. In 1980-1981, Solidarność did take partial control over production. Strikingly, the course also featured materials on workers' councils by the Council Communists, Pannekoek,³³⁹ and Gorter³⁴⁰ – critics of Lenin who wanted a council democracy.

These examples seem to have converged with local or indigenous notions of self-management. For Webster, the fact that “the idea was there”, that “there were workers occupying factories”, and questions that “somehow people think that this latest thing is new”, claiming that “this was standard stuff in our history”.³⁴¹ Numsa, he added, was involved in various “factory occupations leading to workers taking over and running the factories in the 1980s”, and to this we can add that it also had an interest in forming cooperatives.³⁴² Fosatu likewise flirted with idea of co-operatives,³⁴³ and saw the Mondragon Co-op in Spain as a promising example.³⁴⁴ However, the workerists tended to be sceptical of attempting to implement a project of self-management in the context of capitalism, emphasising that the “only successful coops became capitalist themselves” which “meant they could not resist it”.³⁴⁵

Nevertheless, after the dismissal of thousands of Mawu workers in the wake of a strike for recognition at BRT-Sarmcol, Howick in May 1985, workers formed a number of co-operatives, one of which was the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative (Sawco). The co-op's activities included T-shirt silk-screening and vegetable farming, although it also envisaged a bulk food-buying project, which could be utilised to aid striking workers. It employed twenty-five full time workers, was organised democratically and initially co-operators rotating all jobs. It was formally linked to Mawu, being represented on the National

³³⁸ Blazysca, G. 1983. *Planning is Good for You: the case for popular control*. Pluto Press: London

³³⁹ Bricianer, S. 1978. *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils*. Telos Press: St. Louis

³⁴⁰ Gorter, H. 1978. “The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle”, in Smart, D.A (ed.) *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism*, Pluto Press: London

³⁴¹ Interview with Eddie Webster 27th November 2010, Johannesburg

342

Webster, *op. cit* (For a discussion of these events see Philip, T.K. “Enterprise Development on the Margins: Making markets work for the poor?” PhD Dissertation: University of theWitwatersrand)

³⁴³ See *Work in Progress*. 1987. “Sarmcol Strikers' Co-operative: worker controlled production”, No. 46.

³⁴⁴ Webster, *op. cit*.

³⁴⁵ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.11. “The Workers Story”

Executive Committee. Fosatu struggled to sustain such experiments, given that it “did not have the resources or personnel at [that] stage to implement a complex project such as co-operatives”.³⁴⁶ It eventually decided that cooperatives “should be held over to some later stage”.³⁴⁷

Solidarność in Poland and the Yugoslavian experiment with so-called “market socialism”, although containing radical elements, were far less radical on the question of self-management than experiences like the Italian Factory Councils, or the Spanish CNT. These examples attracted attention for its emphasis on direct participation and control by workers over production and administration, as opposed to nationalisation and central planning by the state, and on joint decision making by parliament, self-managed workplaces and trade unions.³⁴⁸ “All the Yugoslavian architects of self-management... drew a crucial distinction between state ownership and social ownership”.³⁴⁹ Considering the problem in a South African context, Webster argued that while “In South Africa, many see the answer in nationalisation, this was understood to be “the lowest form of socialism” according to the Yugoslavian communists”.³⁵⁰

Yet the influence of these last two examples is indicative of some ambiguities on the part of the workerist leadership with regard to the question of self-management. The Yugoslavian model centred on the use of markets in the framework of an economy in which ultimate control was vested in a one-party state. In practice, the Yugoslavian model was characterised by a certain level of decentralisation of production-related decision-making to worker co-operatives, but under a highly repressive dictatorship that in practice did not permit workers self-management to go beyond technical issues of production. Furthermore, real debate on political issues, and even on the goals of production, was not tolerated. Solidarność likewise advocated “different forms of ownership of the means of production” and a “planned market economy” which it believed would lay the basis for “true organs of workers’ self-management”.³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ HP: AH1999, C1.7.1.1.3. Minutes of the 5th Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held on the 25th/26th April 1981.

³⁴⁷ *ibid*

³⁴⁸ Solidarność. 1981. “Directions for Action” published in *Socialist Review*, No. 59, Vol. 11, No. 5, p. 169

³⁴⁹ Webster, “Failed Experiment”, p. 70

³⁵⁰ Webster, *op. cit.* p. 7. Nationalisation is also criticised in the Cosatu Workers Diary of 1987, which cites a Chilean worker leader, Domitila De Chungara, in saying that “the mines were nationalised, that’s true. But in reality, to this day, we aren’t the owners of the mines”.

³⁵¹ Solidarność, “Directions for Action”, p. 170

Webster admitted that Yugoslavian socialism “deepened the regional inequalities in Yugoslavia”,³⁵² but argued therefore that “unequal development can only be overcome through the planned redirection of resources by the central state”.³⁵³ Likewise, Webster optimistically claimed that the “Yugoslavians saw Marx’s idea of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’” as literally “The working class... organised as the state”.³⁵⁴ This was not an accurate description of the Yugoslav Communists’ thought, which was actually more orthodox Marxist-Leninist – despite its interest in self-management as a market reform to improve efficiency in the centrally planned economy. In short, Webster underestimated the determinant role of the Yugoslavian state in determining both politics and policy, and in controlling and directing production, and obscured the problems associated with attempting to combine state control with what is essentially its antithesis, workers’ self-management.

These issues were underplayed by the workerists more generally, who did not adequately discuss the limitations of the market itself, regardless of the forms of ownership, nor the co-existence of workers councils and the “central state”, which had radically different logics of governance. What workerists meant by a “state” was also unclear; sometimes it simply seemed to mean *coordinated governance*, of which the state is *only one* possible form: for example, the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists favoured a decentralised confederation of councils, an idea that Murphy expressed as the replacement of the “territorially constructed State” be replaced with “real democracy” in a non-state “Workers’ Republic”.³⁵⁵

Generally speaking, anarchists and syndicalists “rejected the classical Marxist strategy of the proletarian dictatorship”,³⁵⁶ as well as social democracy because “instead of the ruling party changing the state, the state would change the ruling party”.³⁵⁷ This happened “regardless of their ideology, intent, or social origins” because “those who held state power would always be part of a dominant class”.³⁵⁸ For syndicalists “this would apply regardless of the mandate given to the party, the wages paid to the parliamentarians or the existence of other

³⁵² Webster, “Failed Experiment”, p. 62

³⁵³ *ibid*

³⁵⁴ Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 64

³⁵⁵ Van der Walt, “Anarchism and Syndicalism”, p. 420

³⁵⁶ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 55

³⁵⁷ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*

³⁵⁸ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 54

mechanisms to keep the parliamentarians accountable to their constituents”.³⁵⁹ Thus, the state could not be used by the working class and peasantry. Where social democrats were concerned to replace “bourgeois” politicians with those sympathetic to the cause of the working class and the classical Marxists wanted a new revolutionary state that was genuinely “proletarian”, the anarchists argued for the *abolition* of the state and its replacement by organs of self-management. (This was tied to their theory of class, which viewed top state officials as part of the ruling class: see section 6.3.2).

Unlike syndicalists, Bonner’s view was that “You’d have to have a state”, a common position amongst workerists, although he admits that workerists hadn’t thought their “way through that”.³⁶⁰ Adler concedes that “in terms of kind of talking about taking over the state, or really thinking about how you would do that, aside from supporting a number of bigger issues ... it didn’t go beyond”.³⁶¹ Webster, on the other hand, posits that the problem was not one of direct control, but one of *accountability*, claiming that “the question really is that the state isn’t a force to co-ordinate, the question is how to democratise it, how to make it accountable”.³⁶²

This raises several important strategic questions, none of which, I would argue, were adequately dealt with by the workerist leadership. For example, if Fosatu envisaged building a society based on workers’ self-management, what exactly *was* the fate of the state, and, if it were to remain in existence, what would be its relationship to workers in a factory? Concomitantly, what would be the fate of the unions? Webster for example clearly envisaged a continued role for trade unions in post-capitalist society, arguing that “The best way of ensuring that management is accountable – in a worker managed firm” or any other type “is by building strong industry-wide unions which have an independent organisational presence on the shop-floor”.³⁶³

But “independent” of whom? Making who “accountable” to whom? For classical syndicalists, like Murphy or the CNT, the revolution would place the unions *in direct control of production* and abolish the state: in this sense, the unions *would no longer exist as unions fighting capital and the state*, but as workers councils or cooperatives. If unions were to exist

³⁵⁹ *ibid*

³⁶⁰ Interview with Phil Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁶¹ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³⁶² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁶³ Webster, “Failed Experiment”, p. 71

to defend workers, as Webster suggests, then the unions must evidently exist as a response to owners and managers *separate* to the working class – as opposed to the syndicalist conception in which all such distinction is effaced through cooperative, democratic production.

This raises an important question that revolves around the role of management and the question of division of labour. Syndicalists, for example, have dealt with the problem by regarding today's "management as mere lackeys of the capitalist class", and therefore envisaged "no problem in the workers, through their unions, taking over the functions of management".³⁶⁴ Guild socialists, on the other hand, claimed to be more "conscious of the complexities of industrial administration" and so argued for specialist managers that would *work with* the "democratically organised industrial union, to be transformed into a guild when it became a unit of industrial organisation, should include technical and administrative workers – 'the salariat' – as well as the rank and file manual workers".³⁶⁵

The evidence suggests that workerists tended to follow the latter approach, although this was not universally accepted. For example, according to Adler, "there was a lot of discussion around not needing bosses" and "workers felt that they knew how to do the jobs without HR [Human Resources]".³⁶⁶ Likewise, Fosatu's commitment to endow workers, through their education programme, with "an understanding of technology and production", suggested an attempt to prepare workers for some role in the management of production.³⁶⁷ And, in 1980, Sauls argued that "I do not think the unions have become that powerful that they can take over management roles",³⁶⁸ a formulation that suggests that they *could* eventually become "that powerful".

But others clearly saw some division of labour between workers and managers. Webster, for example, argues that the Yugoslavian experience showed that continued dedication and commitment required that "management needs a "relatively free hand" to make "long-term

³⁶⁴ Ostergaard, J. 1961. "Approaches to Industrial Democracy" in *Anarchy* No. 2, p. 6

³⁶⁵ Ostergaard, J. 1961. "Approaches to Industrial Democracy" in *Anarchy*, No. 2, p. 6

³⁶⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

³⁶⁷ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

³⁶⁸ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1980 "Interview with Freddie Sauls" p. 60.

decisions about investment”.³⁶⁹ Indeed, Copelyn and Bonner seem to agree, both making reference to the difficulties in managing complex organisations and societies.³⁷⁰

8.4.2. Consciousness, Counter-Culture and Counter-Hegemony

Fosatu efforts in building strong, shop floor based, independent and worker-controlled unions were matched only by the amount of time and effort spent on worker education. Its 1982 annual report stated that Fosatu had “devoted considerable effort and resources” to its worker education programme.³⁷¹ Fosatu undoubtedly boasted by far the largest education programme of all unions and federations operating at the time.³⁷² In 1984, for example, Fosatu facilitated 10 residential national courses catering for 200 people, and weekend seminars regionally at least once per month involving between 20 -100 people. Furthermore, each region trained between 400-500 shop stewards yearly, alongside regular parallel courses run by each affiliate union, with further education sessions at various shop stewards’ councils.³⁷³

The workerist commitment to working class self-emancipation, alongside its dedicated struggle for control of the means of ideological and cultural production, are those elements which most definitively place it within the ambit of the New Left. It also shows its affinities for historic anarchism and syndicalism, which stressed the linking of organisations of “counter power” (e.g. strong unions) to the promotion of a revolutionary, class-conscious “counter culture” (in Gramscian terms, “counter hegemony”).

Fosatu education was directed at both short- and longer-term aims. In the short-term, education was primarily designed for the purposes of equipping the shop stewards and organisers with the skills they needed to grow and organisation, and to ensure its effectiveness and durability. For this the workerists stressed that education had to be closely tied to issues like workers control and factory organising, and thus directed primarily at shop stewards; and that workers education should be linked to a workers movement, and accountable to that movement, and as such should have “a specific organisational format”

³⁶⁹ The alternative for Webster is that workers be given “a direct financial stake in the firm such as the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain”. (See Webster, “Failed experiment”, p. 70)

³⁷⁰ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

³⁷¹ Fosatu. 1982. “Annual Report” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 7, No. 4 & 5, p. 114

³⁷² *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1984. “Trade Union Education and Training Programmes”, Vol. 9, No. 8, p. 28

³⁷³ *South African Labour Bulletin*ibid; HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983, p. 17

which a could also ensured that no resources were misdirected by being diffused outside the organisation.

Thus, in contrast to the approach taken by Turner and Fischer in the IIE in the 1970s, workerists emphasised a workplace orientation, in which education dealt primarily with practical training to help workers in a given workplace, for clear purposes, directed to strengthening organisation. By contrast, while the IIE was under Turner, it provided a broad left-wing political, historical and philosophical education. When the IIE was finally being incorporated into Tuacc, it was made directly linked and accountable to the workers movement. In line with the aims of building up strong structures and an effective and accountable shop steward leadership, Fosatu's workerists thus developed several hands-on practical guides and training courses for shop stewards dealing with specific problems on the shopfloor.³⁷⁴

Fosatu's long-term educational goals, however, were more far-reaching and radical, requiring worker education of a different sort. According to Bonner, although "Tuacc sort of retreated into itself" because it "needed to survive", – meaning that its education was basically on the nuts-and-bolts of being a shopsteward. But by the time Fosatu was launched the content of the education had shifted to include "a broader programme of education", which "increasingly broadened out", dealing with "things on international trade unionism, trade unions and politics, a lot on things which related to socialism".³⁷⁵ The Fosatu Advanced Course dealt with such issues as "political history and capitalism, international trade and imperialism, monopoly capitalism, planned economies, the South African economic problem."³⁷⁶ As noted earlier, this included an engagement with the history of radical labour, including the CNT, USI and British Shopstewards and Workers Committee Movement, and Paris 1871, Russia 1917-1918, Italy 1919-1920, and Poland 1980-1981.

³⁷⁴ This focus on directing energy where rewards could best be reaped is reminiscent of the debates held over entry into "community political" struggles, the debate held over the question of industrial versus general unions, and in fact, Fosatu's emphasis on painstaking factory-by factory organisation, in which workerists insistently guarded against what they saw to be a waste of precious energy.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁷⁶ See HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

The purpose of this commitment to broad education was to create “a working class politics”,³⁷⁷ embedded in “a working class movement”,³⁷⁸ and extending beyond the union movement and reaching into *all* spheres of life: material, political, ideological and cultural. The workerist project was therefore imbued with a concern, in the long-term, to ignite the growth of a “counter-hegemonic” working class politics, consciousness and culture – that required the emergence of a class conscious, accountable and active layer of worker leaders.

Fosatu’s education programme was structured around “three major aims”: “to train worker leadership, to develop confidence in a worker culture and for education to be seen as liberatory and not oppressive”.³⁷⁹ There are obvious “counter hegemonic” overtones to these themes, as will be discussed in coming sections. In fact, if workerism “coalesced” around Gramscian ideas,³⁸⁰ it is in this arena that his influence is most evident.

And it is here, too, that an important, if largely unrecognised and indirect syndicalist influence on the workerist current can be detected. Gramsci’s theory of “cultural hegemony” (sometimes called “cultural prefiguration”) – taken up with vigour by activists and protagonists of the American and European (and South African) New Left – was directly influenced by syndicalism with its emphasis on a revolutionary proletarian counter-culture as means to overcome the ideological persistence and dominance produced by the ruling class under capitalism.³⁸¹

These ideas actually preceded Gramsci by many years the early Gramsci himself, as noted earlier in this chapter, being deeply influenced by the anarchists and syndicalists who dominated the Italian revolutionary left. He shared the syndicalists’ vision of the “prefigurative” character of factory occupations.³⁸² His notion of “hegemony” was tied to

³⁷⁷ Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, p. 279

³⁷⁸ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”

³⁷⁹ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984: no page numbers

³⁸⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

³⁸¹ See Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*

³⁸² Indeed, Levy claims that the “pioneering efforts” of the early industrial syndicalists, who stressed greater shop floor control and democracy, wage parity and a more militant internal commission system” (p. 12) were formative in the development of Gramsci’s thought, and ideas that originated amongst the early syndicalists (including Filippo Corridoni) were later repeated by Gramsci. In the journal, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, Despite the fact that Gramsci criticised the union structure, the factory council that he advocated instead were very close: “in many respects its functions were similar” (Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists*, p. 13)

that of Sorel, who derived it from the syndicalists,³⁸³ and there are close “similarities” in the leading Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta's writings and Gramsci's notion of hegemony.³⁸⁴ Thus, although “the view that a revolutionary movement must aim to establish an ideological counter-hegemony as part of the class struggle is often attributed to Antonio Gramsci” these concepts were actually “common currency in the broad anarchist tradition many decades before Gramsci wrote, as anarchists and syndicalists struggled to create an ‘oppositional counter-public’” that could change the world.³⁸⁵ Likewise,

when some dissident intellectuals in post-war Europe began to fashion a Marxism that accommodated a larger role for cultural factors and a more complex view of class consciousness, they were engaging in some of the concerns of syndicalism, as some of them acknowledged. While Italy's Antonio Gramsci, George Lukacs, Germany's Karl Korsch, communists all, by no means endorsed syndicalism, they all felt its influence.³⁸⁶

The importance assigned to the ideological sphere can be discerned, for example, through an analysis of the syndicalist IWW, which “flourished as a propaganda body among the lowliest of workers, promulgating a music a pattern of libertarian tactics... and a cultural élan that won many admirers if not many members”.³⁸⁷

8.4.2.1. Culture

An acceptance of Gramsci's stress on the role of non-coercive ideological control over the working class in sustaining capitalism – as opposed to just brute force – had important strategic implications for workerists. It suggested that the struggle for worker control in the workplace in the larger society necessarily included an ideological component, in which the pervasiveness of the imposed bourgeois culture was systematically broken down. The purpose of the term “working class culture”, used extensively in the period, was to “indicate those practices of the working class that have been developed in full consciousness to

³⁸³ Laclau E. and Mouffe C. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso: London, p. 36-42

³⁸⁴ Levy, C, 1998. “Charisma and Social Movements: Errico Malatesta and Italian Anarchism” in *Modern Italy* Vol. 3, No. 2. Available at http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/439850_731355195_792268697.pdf; Nursey-Bray, P. 1995. “Malatesta and the anarchist Revolution” in *Anarchist Studies* Vol. 3, No. 1

³⁸⁵ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 189

³⁸⁶ Thorpe. 2011. “Challenging the Cultural Legitimation of War: International syndicalists in Europe 1914 – 18” in *Socialist History*, No. 37, p. 40

³⁸⁷ Buhle, 2011. “Syndicalism in the United States” in *Socialist History*, No. 37, p. 16

challenge and take ground from the dominant class”.³⁸⁸ It suggested the need to develop a “culture of the oppressed” to use against the “culture of the oppressor”.³⁸⁹

According to Bonner the “cluster of ideas” around culture and consciousness so central in the New Left (of which the “Gramscian notion” of “popular culture” was part) played an important role in defining Fosatu’s educational ambitions.³⁹⁰ For Erwin the “cosmic thinking” behind Fosatu’s education programme was “to give people a sense of belonging to a national worker organisation”³⁹¹ and to “reinforce a sense of working class identity, to reinforce working class confidence and counter the kind of anti-worker propaganda that prevails in general education and the media”.³⁹²

Although Fosatu’s education was concerned from the beginning with building the consciousness of the class, there was a shift in Fosatu’s education programme around 1983. From this point, “a new direction” involving “a greater cultural dimension” was embraced, and Fosatu “experimented by combining courses, lectures and cultural events”,³⁹³ culminating by the launch of the Fosatu Education Workshop (“FEW”). The workshop was essentially a cultural festival that “gave some very welcome exposure to worker choirs and plays”.³⁹⁴ This directional shift derived from the assessment that “for too long the bourgeoisie has dominated the area of culture”,³⁹⁵ and the realisation of the corresponding imperative to “create an awareness that a working class culture and ideology is possible”.³⁹⁶ Evidently the strategy for expanding worker culture and the way that workers had begun to identify – and then challenge – hegemonic ideas was witnessed with excitement by various writers.³⁹⁷

Contemporary South African writers suggested that “as the oppressed class begins to resist and as it begins to develop the organisations and institutions of struggle, it must find its own

³⁸⁸ Harvey, D. 1984. “Trade Unions and Culture” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 64

³⁸⁹ Sole. K. 1984 “Class and Populism” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 8, p. 66

³⁹⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010

³⁹¹ Erwin. 1984. “The Fosatu Education Workshop” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 8, p. 118

³⁹² *ibid*

³⁹³ Erwin, “The Fosatu Education”, p. 116

³⁹⁴ Naledi Writers Unit, 1985. “Working Class Culture and Popular Struggle” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 10, No. 5

³⁹⁵ HP: AH2065, D3.1. Recommendations on the 1985 Education Programme to the Central Committee Meeting Held 20th October 1984

³⁹⁶ *ibid* *South African Labour Bulletin*

³⁹⁷ See *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1983. “Lectures for Workers”, Vol. 8, No. 8 and Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 37; Naledi Writers Unit, 1985. “Working Class Culture and Popular Struggle” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 10 No. 5, p.24

cultural position – remember its history, identify its heroes, write new songs and sing them, start newspapers, literacy circles, theatre and discussion groups”.³⁹⁸ All of these spheres of cultural production attracted Fosatu’s attention, and by 1983 the federation boasted an impressive arsenal of cultural media and media outlets, events and institutions, which in any assessment would be seen as the beginnings of a counter-hegemonic worker culture.

Fosatu’s workerist leadership, for example, produced a *Fosatu Songbook*, endorsed “educational meetings” in Shop Stewards Councils,³⁹⁹ assisted in setting up reading groups in locals,⁴⁰⁰ combined picnics with educational projects,⁴⁰¹ and hosted an Open Day at Wits University – a “festival of events: plays, choirs, dance groups, storytelling, children’s events and videos”.⁴⁰² Fosatu also ran several of its own newspapers, including *Fosatu Press Digest*, comprising a collection of newspaper clippings relevant to workers, and *Fosatu Worker News*,⁴⁰³ formerly *Isisebenzi*, the federation’s own mouthpiece. The latter was intended to foster a sense of working class identity, and “to break down inter-union barriers and feelings of sectionalism between workers in different industries”,⁴⁰⁴ while giving “prominence” to worker culture⁴⁰⁵ by printing articles or poems written by workers.⁴⁰⁶

The insight that “history is a major aspect of culture”⁴⁰⁷ was not missed on workerists. “Popular history”⁴⁰⁸ (promoted by the History Workshop) was major not only an organising tool, and a “way of dealing with political issues”,⁴⁰⁹ it was fundamentally part of the project of advancing the self-awareness of the working class about its own history, traditions and struggles. Amongst Fosatu’s “heroes” was Solly Sachs of the Garment Workers Union, a

³⁹⁸ Naledi Writers Unit, *op. cit.*, p. 24

³⁹⁹ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983. p. 17

⁴⁰⁰ Sideris, T. 1984. “Trade Union Newspapers” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9. No 8, p. 19

⁴⁰¹ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Adrienne Bird [education co-ordinator] report to NEDCOM on the Fosatu Labour Studies Course, 18/09/1984

⁴⁰² Erwin, “The Fosatu Education”, p. 116

⁴⁰³ *Fosatu Worker News* was preceded by *Isisebenzi*, which was produced by the Wages Commissions in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The philosophy of *Isisebenzi* was that “a workers’ newspaper would say more when it was written by workers” (DISA website, http://Disa.nu.ac.za/index.php?option=com_browse&rid=jou), which was clearly retained throughout the Fosatu period, given that *Fosatu Worker News* encouraged submissions and contributions from workers.

⁴⁰⁴ Ian Bissel cited in Sideris, *op. cit.*, p. 19

⁴⁰⁵ For an example see HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*, Nov 1985

⁴⁰⁶ HP: AH2065, D3.1. Recommendations on the 1985 Education Programme to the Central Committee Meeting Held 20th October 1984: no page numbers

⁴⁰⁷ Naledi Writers Unit, “Worker Culture”, p. 24

⁴⁰⁸ Callinicos, L. 1986. “The People’s Past: Towards Transforming the Present” in *Critical Arts*, Vol. 4. No. 2, p. 21

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

“one time syndicalist,”⁴¹⁰ and then member of the Communist Party, who, though expelled for not following the party line, who retained a deep sympathy for Marxism-Leninism.⁴¹¹ Sachs was revered by the workerists, not because of this commitment to Marxism-Leninism, but due to his uncompromising non-racialism, expressed in the famous Garment Workers Union of the 1940s, which organised both black and white. Fosatu even produced a booklet entitled “Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers Union”,⁴¹² highlighting Sachs as a way of creating a usable past for Fosatu’s members.

An important “Making of the Working Class” series ran in *Fosatu Worker News*, which provided an overview of major class struggles in South Africa – and drew lessons from them. *Fosatu Worker News* also ran several articles on May Day, including one entitled “May 1” in which the history and traditions of May Day, from its origins in the 1887 hanging of (anarchist) Chicago “radical worker leaders” in the wake of the first mass strikes for the 8 hour day in the United States, to its arrival and development in South Africa, were detailed,⁴¹³ although their anarchism was omitted. Fosatu also published several “Workers’ Lives” books outlining the stories of certain influential worker leaders, one of which was Alfred Temba Qabula, a Fosatu worker-poet.

A big part of what was distinctive about the New Left was its counter-cultural aspect, and the way in which values, attitudes and particular forms of not just social but also interpersonal relationships previously unquestioned were suddenly brought under scrutiny in mainstream society.⁴¹⁴ This could, of course, mean simply an alternative, fringe lifestyle, but for those serious about politics, it meant something far more. This transformation of the interpersonal manifested in South Africa too – Turner’s relationship to his students was one example, workerism is another. Foster, for example, claimed that workerists “lived” socialism out in the everyday – often hosting each other at their personal houses when on union trips.⁴¹⁵ Sauls recalled that the conception of worker control could go beyond the factory; that everyone had “a right to be heard” and a responsibility to “understand and listen”.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁰ Van Der Walt and Ulrich, “South Africa, Labour Movement”, p. 3093. Sachs was part of the syndicalist International Socialist League in the late 1910s, but was later a fervent Communist.

⁴¹¹ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁴¹² HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3.2. Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers’ Union, Fosatu Education Series Booklet

⁴¹³ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “May Day”. Feb/Mar, No. 65/36

⁴¹⁴ Birchall, I.H. 1974. Workers against the Monolith, p. 187

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

8.4.2.2. Popular Education

For Gramsci, the official school system was fundamentally structured to ensure class domination, both by coercive and non-coercive means. Gramsci's claim that each social group in society had its own type of school "intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate"⁴¹⁷ displays some close similarities with Fosatu's analysis. For Fosatu, "schools are not neutral but are part of the political struggle in South Africa... the government and the bosses want workers' children to be educated so that they can fit into jobs in the economy".⁴¹⁸

Workerists understood the means of ideological production to be controlled by the ruling class, and that because of this it has "been able to dominate others by controlling what and how they learn".⁴¹⁹ State schools were thus a major institution through which bourgeois culture and values were disseminated and made hegemonic: "learning also involves the learning of beliefs, attitudes and values which are accepted as 'normal' and 'good' by the society which we live in".⁴²⁰ Similarly, workerism stressed the subtle ways in which the school inculcates a culture of passivity amongst the children of workers, and discourages active thought and inquisitive investigation.⁴²¹ As such, a major part of the workerist strategy revolved around debunking the idea that learning was oppressive, and on insisting that "knowledge must be available to everyone and not some restricted and mysterious secret".⁴²²

Workerists in Fosatu agreed therefore that the "appalling legacy of the present education system" had to be challenged, in both its "peculiarly South African" form of segregated education, with most workers experiencing inferior Bantu Education, and in its general form in capitalist society.⁴²³ This required that workers build their own education system that "suits their class".⁴²⁴ For Erwin, an appropriate worker education would consist of "the kind of subject matter another social system would have given people in schools", including history,

⁴¹⁷ Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart: London

⁴¹⁸ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11 Article for *Fosatu Worker News*, "Education"

⁴¹⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, "What is Education? Part 1", p. 7

⁴²⁰ *Fosatu Worker News*, "What is Education? Part 2", November 1985, No. 43, p. 7

⁴²¹ Erwin, "The Fosatu Education Workshop", p. 118

⁴²² HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

⁴²³ *ibid*

⁴²⁴ *Fosatu Worker News*. "What is Education? - part 2", *op cit.*, p.7

geography and economics, but that it must be “independent from both bosses and government”.⁴²⁵

Apart from its various organisers’ and shop stewards training and literacy courses, Fosatu ran a comprehensive set of courses for various levels, covering a variety of topics - history, economics, politics, philosophy and law.⁴²⁶ It also covered the “various experiences of working class movements around the world, which were about the theory of state power”.⁴²⁷ (Again, it is significant that the bulk of the examples chosen for their theories of the state were libertarian and self-managed in approach, stressing the self-liberation of the working class, as opposed to the authoritarian, partyist conceptions of Marxism-Leninism.)

There was also a concerted attempt to expose sections of society outside of the membership to this alternative education. For example, Fosatu began a project, the Zisizeni Basebenzi Project, to produce school uniforms and clothing for members”.⁴²⁸ It also ran “a school holiday programme... for the children of members”,⁴²⁹ which covered material relevant to school subjects and information on unions.⁴³⁰ In addition attempts were made to set up “decentralised libraries” at each union office.⁴³¹ Furthermore, in an effort to overcome the political passivity imposed on children through the schooling system, and “in the hope of fostering an understanding and support from students for working class struggles,”⁴³² Fosatu encouraged parents to “pass on” the unions’ newspaper to their children.⁴³³

8.4.2.3. “Organic Intellectuals”

It has already been noted that Fosatu’s workerist leadership was keen to invest the federation’s limited resources where the benefits were most likely to be reaped. This was true for worker education as well,⁴³⁴ which involved targeting specific individuals in the shop steward layer for admission into its various educational platforms. Through this it was hoped

⁴²⁵ *Fosatu Worker News*. “What is Education –part 2”, *op. cit.*, p.7

⁴²⁶ See for example HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3. Fosatu Labour studies course 1982, p. 2

⁴²⁷ Telephone interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

⁴²⁸ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.1. *Fosatu Worker News*. “Fosatu: the first year”, April 1980, No. 4

⁴²⁹ HP: AH 2065, D3.1. Minutes of the Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held in Wilgespruit in Johannesburg, 20/21 October 1984, p. 11; *Fosatu Worker News*. 1979. “The Zisizeni Basebenzi Project”, October edn. p. 2

⁴³⁰ HP: AH2065, D3.1. Recommendations on the 1985 Education Programme to the Central Committee Meeting Held 20th October 1984

⁴³¹ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.5.1 Letter from Shireen Motala (Education Officer) to the General Secretary regarding the Fosatu training course

⁴³² *Fosatu Worker News* cited Sideris, “Trade Union Newspapers”, p. 19

⁴³³ *ibid*

⁴³⁴ Hence the controversy over the IIE’s loose approach and lack of accountability.

that a politically astute and accountable cadre of worker leaders constituting “a serious political force”⁴³⁵ would emerge. According to Erwin, the “main priority” of Fosatu’s education programme was the creation of a “worker leadership”⁴³⁶ as the centre from where knowledge and a new worker culture would radiate.

The reasoning was that the shop steward layer was understood to be the most influential constituency of the union, given its direct contact to the shop floor. The most promising shop stewards were therefore key to strengthening the federation and achieving its larger goals. Fosatu stipulated that it was the “task of shop stewards to educate “non-members,”⁴³⁷ and insisted that “selected members are expected to report back and share what they have learnt”.⁴³⁸ Fosatu’s leadership deliberately encouraged shop stewards to share what they had learnt with other strata in society too, so that those who had undergone Fosatu’s courses would be able “to play an effective role in the factory, in their union and in society”.⁴³⁹ Thus Fosatu attempted to win the “ideology/consciousness battle” amongst shop stewards, in the hope that this would “spread out” and become influential in the community as shop stewards became “key players” in that sphere.⁴⁴⁰

Care was also taken to direct *Fosatu Worker News* at a clearly selected constituency. Callinicos noted that that the language of the main features in *Fosatu Worker News* was actually beyond the reach of most workers, who were “less accustomed to reading”, adding that the length of each issue was “daunting”.⁴⁴¹ This was because *Fosatu Worker News* was “directed principally at the more literate factory floor worker leadership”, who could “impart the knowledge so gained to fellow workers in meetings and discussions”.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁵ HP: AH 2065 D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

⁴³⁶ Erwin, “The Fosatu Education Workshop”, p. 116

⁴³⁷ *ibid*

⁴³⁸ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1984. “Trade Union Education and Training Programmes”, Vol. 9, No 8, p. 19

⁴³⁹ Erwin, *op. cit*, p. 119

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁴¹ Callinicos, “The People’s Past”, p. 22

⁴⁴² *ibid*

Perhaps there is a link here with Gramsci's distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals, with a critical role for the latter in the building of counter-hegemony:⁴⁴³ claiming that "the intellectuals most capable of contributing to progressive social change were not those of the traditional or professional type" but those engaged in "praxis",⁴⁴⁴ engaged in "active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader".⁴⁴⁵ Thus new ideas would not be introduced or "propagandised" as extraneous inputs into mass politics but would be integrated into the very fabric of proletarian culture.⁴⁴⁶ In a similar way, Erwin describes how,

Transformation requires a reforming of skills to make them accessible and controllable by ordinary people. The process of breaking down a dependency on experts and technicians can begin now as a political practice. Such guidelines... may be crucial if we are to build a new tomorrow by learning today.⁴⁴⁷

8.4.3. Counter-power vs. Co-determination

The notion that today's struggles must prefigure the future society was a core principle of anarchism and syndicalism from their emergence in the 1860s. The "struggle for a new society embody within itself the seeds of the new order, so that the basic framework of the new society would have already been created within and through the struggle against the new order of things".⁴⁴⁸ Thus, syndicalist unions were understood to perform a dual function, being simultaneously "the fighting organisation of the workers against the employers" and "the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with technical management of production and economic life in general".⁴⁴⁹ In this sense, the unions, as *simultaneously* organs of *resistance* and of *revolution*, constituted structures of counter power: resisting the powerful, in order to *supplant* them.

These ideas can also be found in the early Gramsci, who envisaged the Italian Factory Councils as organs of worker control that could *prefigure* the organs of self-government in

⁴⁴³ At least in his early syndicalist-influenced phase, Gramsci stressed the necessity of mass participation and self-activity for these purposes, which contrasts with the Leninist conceptions that stress the role of an elite group of professional revolutionaries.

⁴⁴⁴ Appelrough, S. and Edles, L.D. 1965. *Classical and contemporary Sociological Theory*. Sage: New Delhi.

⁴⁴⁵ Gramsci, *Selections*, p. 10

⁴⁴⁶ Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism*, p. 77-78

⁴⁴⁷ Erwin, "The Question of Unity", p. 65

⁴⁴⁸ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 65

⁴⁴⁹ Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 57

post-capitalist society: “the nucleus of a new state appearing within the daily life of capitalism”;⁴⁵⁰ “the point of entry for the new civilization”;⁴⁵¹ “the new proletarian order”.⁴⁵² Gramsci’s essay *Soviets in Italy* stressed that workplace structures, “developed and enriched,” “must be the organs of proletarian power, replacing the capitalist in all his useful functions of management and administration”.⁴⁵³

There is evidence of the idea of revolutionary prefiguration amongst workerist leaders as well. Bonner’s claim that workerists were “doing something very similar” to the Italian Factory Councils is instructive.⁴⁵⁴ Sauls likewise argued that the workerist emphasis on worker control was informed by the vision of the sort of society desired.⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, *Fosatu Worker News* stated, “Such an organisation [the democratic trade union] opposes the strict authority of the capitalist bosses and trains workers for the role which they will play in future society” so that “in South Africa, unions have become schools for worker democracy”.⁴⁵⁶

A strategy of prefiguration, however, raises important questions about the nature of struggle required to achieve such a situation, in which two basic choices emerge - each shaped by somewhat different views of the future society itself. The first involves *independent* and *oppositional* struggle and tends to envisage the future society as created through a revolutionary rupture and seizure of power. The other stresses participation and collaboration in management and/or state structures, and tends to envisage the future society as created through a series of reforms based upon class compromises.

Anarchists and syndicalists, for example, have tended to follow the former of these approaches, aiming to build a “counter-power” that can supplant the existing order. Eurocommunists and Guild Socialists, with a gradualist, social democratic approach, have tended to the latter. The syndicalist approach stems from the syndicalist doctrine that means (and thus strategy) must be consistent with ends (and thus principles), that revolution was essential, and that struggles must thus be fought from below, and remain independent, in

⁴⁵⁰ Boggs cited in Tilly, L.A. 1979. “Gramsci and Factory Councils” in *International Labour and Working Class History*, Vol. 14, p. 34

⁴⁵¹ *ibid*

⁴⁵² Williams cited in Tilly, *op. cit.*, p. 36

⁴⁵³ Gramsci, “Soviets in Italy”, p. 36

⁴⁵⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁴⁵⁶ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.3. “Only Workers can Directly Challenge the Capitalists” in *Fosatu Worker News* August 1985, No. 40, p. 11

order to transform society: “it had to be a self-managed struggle conducted *outside of and against* the state”⁴⁵⁷ which “required the creation of organs of counter-power able to supplant the organs of ruling class power”.⁴⁵⁸ Thus while “*political struggles* – around state policy as well as civil and political freedoms – were absolutely central... *political action*, understood as *using* the state machinery, was not”.⁴⁵⁹

Eurocommunism, on the other hand, although it made reference to Gramsci’s version of the theory of prefiguration,⁴⁶⁰ was premised on “a belief that progressive political change and the achievement of socialism could and should occur through the institutions of the liberal democratic state”.⁴⁶¹ Thus it was seen as “possible to infiltrate and transform the state”.⁴⁶² It is therefore generally centred on an approach, which emphasises democratisation through *engagement*: which means participation and collaboration. This, too, was consistent with its aims: if the aim was a democratised and representative state, then the working class *had to participate* in that state by all possible means.

The notion that there had to be a consistency of ends and means was often present in workerism. Copelyn, for example, argued in 1982 that “the operational policies of the non-racial union movement are essentially bound up with the problematic of participatory democracy”.⁴⁶³ The most important statement of the importance of consistency of means to ends, however, is in a paper by Erwin, which essentially sought to come to grips with the colonial component of the South African workers struggle and to formulate a class-based, or workerist, response to demands for national liberation.⁴⁶⁴

In so doing Erwin problematised the “usual two-stage solution” of the SACP, where “the first stage will deal with the oppressive and anti-democratic regime, and the second stage can

⁴⁵⁷ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 65, emphasis added

⁴⁵⁸ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 65

⁴⁵⁹ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 138, emphasis added

⁴⁶⁰ See for example, Harman, C. 1977 “Gramsci versus Eurocommunism” in *International Socialism*, No. 98, May edn. Available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1977/05/gramsci1.html>>

⁴⁶¹ Simon, R. 2007. “Eurocommunism” in D. Glaser, and D. Walker (eds). *Marxism: a Twentieth Century Perspective*. Routledge: United Kingdom. p. 81

⁴⁶² Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 90

⁴⁶³ Copelyn, J. 1982. “Problems in Collective Bargaining”, paper presented at a seminar organised by the Natal Chamber of Industries, reprinted in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 72

⁴⁶⁴ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”. This paper was critiqued in a subsequent article by the SACP’s Jeremy Cronin. See Cronin, J. 1986. “The Question of Unity - a reply” In *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 3

address itself to issues of economic equality, production and consumption”.⁴⁶⁵ In its place, Erwin suggested an alternative approach revolving around what is termed “political practices” – i.e. the “form in which political – in its widest sense – activities are carried out” and “regularized into institutional ways of functioning”.⁴⁶⁶ Erwin used various examples to show how “practices related to transformation become essential”, raising “very important considerations *about how the form of a struggle can shape its practices and programmes*”.⁴⁶⁷ For Erwin “the form of the struggle may of itself raise the issue of transformation to a position of centrality”.⁴⁶⁸ The crux therefore is whether “liberation politics” can *within themselves* contain the “political practices” that will *simultaneously* undermine the legitimacy of the apartheid regime, and address problems of economic *and* political transformation, something which the democratic trade unions had already begun to achieve:

...the particular form of unionism that they have evolved that has raised the issue more clearly. This unionism is based on shop-floor organisation and democratic participation of worker representatives in control of the union and negotiation... This generates an effective and militant unionism but it also addresses the problems of transformation since it establishes democratic organisation within the productive process itself.⁴⁶⁹

This approach, termed “building tomorrow today”,⁴⁷⁰ contains a noteworthy resonance with the syndicalist notions of matching ends with means. Van der Walt counterpoises the anarchist/syndicalist strategy of “militant abstention based on direct action”, to the social democratic strategy of “co-determination”.⁴⁷¹ The former entails strong, independent unions that can *impose* their will on management (in this sense, pushing back the “frontier of control”), and eventually *take over* management itself. The latter is, on the contrary, a form of class collaboration, which must necessarily, given the unequal power of the classes and the dynamics of capitalism, impose “ruinous compromises” on labour, such as productivity agreements: capital will only accept compromises *in its own interest*, and that interest is necessarily antithetical to working class interests. To accept, even impose, such compromises, the union must act in ways also antithetical to the principle of working class independence, inasmuch as it accepts the capitalist logic.

⁴⁶⁵ Erwin, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶⁶ Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 55-56

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid*, emphasis added

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁶⁹ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 69

⁴⁷⁰ Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 68

⁴⁷¹ Van Der Walt, “Saving jobs”, no page numbers

However, thinking through this distinction seems to have been less important for the workerists. Often the workerist strategy in this regard separates itself from its quasi-syndicalist inclinations, and moves decisively in the direction of social democracy, arguably akin to the Eurocommunist reading of Gramsci.⁴⁷²

For example, Adler recalls having a range of discussions in Mawu about “worker control” at certain BMW satellite factories where limited functions were carried out.⁴⁷³ Here the union leaders “even talked about co-determination” where workers “participate on a workers council” as was the case in Germany, where the “works councils” system involved labour in a limited range of production decisions.⁴⁷⁴ In Adler’s example, this “co-determination” involved, “in the one factory”, a “very short-lived productivity agreement... and the shop stewards council got the chance to look at productivity figures and kind of comment on that”.⁴⁷⁵ Bonner also reported that Fosatu sought to “educate the shop stewards and others to the point where they could deal with things like productivity in a creative way”, explaining that “you’ve got to be able to do that, and so if workers are in control, they’ve got to be sophisticated.”⁴⁷⁶

The question, however, is precisely if workers genuinely would be “in control”, and if so, of what? What is notable about this example is that Adler did not draw a distinction between *worker control* i.e. the *usurpation* of managerial control and the erosion of managerial autonomy by workers, and *joint-control*, which involves no such sacrifice by management, but rather workers cooperating with management goals i.e. co-determination.⁴⁷⁷ The result of such co-determinist engagement at BMW – that “it didn’t work very well”, and “a lot” of shop stewards “got co-opted”⁴⁷⁸ – seems to be precisely what anarchists/syndicalists expected. This is the evidence cited, in fact, for their argument for autonomy and militant abstention – which clearly workerists had either not been exposed to, or appreciated. The difference

⁴⁷² It must be stressed that the workerists did not quite embrace the full logic of Eurocommunism, which stressed brief “anti-monopoly” alliances, which included besides the working class, the *petit bourgeoisie* and non-monopoly capital. This is clearly not applicable to workerism.

⁴⁷³ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid*.

⁴⁷⁶ See interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁷⁷ Many employers have recognised the benefits of joint control: “that management should ‘regain control by (nominally) sharing it’, is, as has been seen, the natural incorporationist prescription.” (See Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*, p. 50)

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

therefore, revolves around whether unions prefigure a new society through building organs of counter-power, or by co-determination.

Theorists of workers' control and industrial democracy have long debated this important issue, one of which was GDH Cole, a Guild Socialist and long-standing member of the social democratic Fabian Society.⁴⁷⁹ According to Horn, workerists "were very influenced by... notions of Fabian Socialism",⁴⁸⁰ and were aware of the work of Guild Socialists like Cole.⁴⁸¹ Cole's theory of "encroaching control" was premised on the belief that "collective bargaining... can be used as a means of getting a share in the actual control of management".⁴⁸² It had an element of prefiguration, but linked this to a series of gradual reforms, including legislative ones, and class compromises (i.e. it did not entail forcing back the "frontier of control" through direct action with the aim of taking over). In some respects, Guild Socialism sounds rather like syndicalism:

Cole's 1917 analysis indicates how the model society might develop out of the current activity of the labour movement: increasingly effective and self-confident trade unions would successfully erode managerial prerogatives, in a process of 'encroaching control'; more and more aspects of production would become subject to negotiation; finally the unions, reorganised on a more rational basis would be strong enough (in key industries at least) to oust the capitalist from detailed management altogether.⁴⁸³

But Guild Socialism diverges from syndicalism on the important question of method. As Ostergaard notes, "Syndicalism was essentially a proletarian movement which pinned its faith on direct revolutionary industrial reaction culminating in the social general strike" i.e. the expropriation of the workplaces for self-management. However, "guild socialism, in contrast, was largely a movement of bourgeois intellectuals which, while supporting direct action, hoped to see workers' control introduced as a constitutional reform through the state".⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ See for example, Cole, M. 1961. *The Story of Fabian Socialism*. Heineman Educational Books Ltd: London

⁴⁸⁰ Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁴⁸¹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.11. "The Workers Story"

⁴⁸² Cole, GDH. [1917] 1911. *The World of Labour: A discussion of the present and future of trade unionism*. Routledge: New York, p. 8-9

⁴⁸³ Hyman, R. 1975. "Foreword" in Goodrich, CL, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics*. Pluto Press: London, p. xvi

⁴⁸⁴ Ostergaard, "Approaches to Industrial Democracy" p. 6

Guild Socialism in Britain therefore often saw “Guildsmen like Cole ... assist directly in devising trade union plans for restructuring industries, but including compromises in which, for the sake of acceptance by capital and the state, saw self-management “replaced by various schemes of ‘joint control’”.⁴⁸⁵ In contrast, the British syndicalist Willie Gallacher,⁴⁸⁶ chair of the Clyde Workers’ Committee, emphasised that “a share in control does not imply that the workers should enter into any sort of alliance with the employer, or incur joint responsibility with him, or be identified with him in any way... *what we win in our advance we control exclusively and independently*”.⁴⁸⁷

Therefore if workerist strategy’s approximates elements of syndicalism, its obfuscation of the distinction between self-management and joint control, and its willingness to make use of collective contracts such as productivity agreements and “co-determination”, clearly places it closer to the class collaborationist approach. This approach can be found in both Guild Socialism, and in the social democratic Fabian Socialism and Eurocommunism. Because it stressed “engagement” in order to *participate* in and democratisation of *existing* state and capitalist institutions, rather than their supersession by a new proletarian democracy, workerism distances itself from syndicalism here.

Various other strategic and tactical choices made by the workerist leadership highlight the importance of this “participationist” approach. The basis of Fosatu’s entry into multilateral Industrial Councils, state-sanctioned industry-wide bargaining councils, is one of these.⁴⁸⁸ Participation in structures that centralise unions, that undermine accountability, that impose upon unions a culture of negotiation, and that impose, as a condition of entrance, adherence to procedures that undermine direct action (e.g. compulsory mediation before a strike can be legal), would be rejected by syndicalists.

The Fosatu decision to enter the ICs was taken in spite of Fosatu’s own view that participation would present “real problems with worker participation and control”, and therefore that “complicated structures have to be set up” which would have the result that

⁴⁸⁵ Hyman, “Foreword”, p. xvii

⁴⁸⁶ Gallacher was a De Leonist syndicalist. De Leon, despite his self-identification as a Marxist, was a syndicalist. (See van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 160 – 164)

⁴⁸⁷ Gallacher and Paton, *Towards Industrial Democracy*, no page numbers, my emphasis

⁴⁸⁸ It must be stressed that Fosatu’s decision to enter into IC’s was made only on the basis that three conditions were met: that plant-based bargaining was maintained, that the “rights and functions of Shop Stewards were not restricted” and that recognition was “based on representivity and not granted to minority unions where majority unions existed in the plant”. (AH 2065 D4.2, p. 15 Fosatu Annual Report – 1982. March 1983)

“many workers will not be able to participate in the negotiation”.⁴⁸⁹ Similarly, Fosatu recognised that “Clearly the employers prefer the latter approach” of working through ICs and using ICs to patrol agreements to open conflict because “the union is then not directly involved in the factory”.⁴⁹⁰ So, workerist leaders were aware that this decision would necessarily engender the development of a technocratic layer of professional negotiators,⁴⁹¹ but believed that they could be turned inside out and used to further the worker struggle if balanced by maintaining an active link between the negotiators and the shopfloor.⁴⁹²

By contrast, the syndicalist approach stresses that there “an inherent contradiction between a technocratic approach and a class struggle approach”.⁴⁹³ Contemporary critics of Fosatu’s role in ICs likewise argued that such participation was not just dangerous but unnecessary: the “power to demand negotiation with the bosses, power to win victories – is based on the workers support for the union, and the nature of that support... bosses negotiate with unions on the basis of worker support, regardless of whether the union is registered or not”.⁴⁹⁴

Other examples of the “politics of engagement” are similarly revealing. Ulrich, for example, details how in their search for legitimacy, “rather than contest the role of homelands and the undemocratic aspects of traditional political structures” certain Tuacc workerist leaders “sought to develop relations with KwaZulu officials”,⁴⁹⁵ that is, with the chiefs of the apartheid-era KwaZulu homeland.⁴⁹⁶ Tuacc’s constitution initially “allowed a place”⁴⁹⁷ for Chief Buthelezi and his appointee, Barney Dladla, and both KwaZulu officials were included on Fosatu’s Northern Natal Executive.⁴⁹⁸ Likewise, the launch of the Northern Natal Fosatu Branch in February 1982 was celebrated by a speech by Mr. Z. A Khanyile, KwaZulu’s Chief Labour Officer, who proceeded to use the occasion to threaten the unions that they should

⁴⁸⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3 Industrial Relations Under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet, p. 13

⁴⁹⁰ Fosatu. 1982. “The Parallel Union Thrust: Memorandum issued by Fosatu on 8 November 1979” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 5, No. 6 & 7, p. 81-82

⁴⁹¹ See Webster, “Mawu and the Industrial”

⁴⁹² Thus, Fosatu developed a “two-tier collective bargaining structure”, where industry-wide and plant based negotiations could take place, thereby attempting to include workers “in the actual working of the Councils, rather than the formality of being covered by the Industrial Council Agreements”. (HP: AH 1999 C1.1.1.

“Fosatu: its policies and objectives”, August 1980, p. 3)

⁴⁹³ Van der Walt, “Saving Jobs”, no page numbers

⁴⁹⁴ Haysom, “In search of”, p. 30

⁴⁹⁵ Ulrich, *Only the Workers*, p. 135

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁹⁷ Bonner, “Focus on Fosatu”

⁴⁹⁸ HP: AH 1999. C1.1.1. An Introduction to the Fosatu, June 1983

know “how to go about in negotiations with employers”.⁴⁹⁹ Fosatu even considered a proposal in 1985 “that M. Buthelezi be asked to co-ordinate” a report on “the position in the homelands”.⁵⁰⁰ Given the workerists’ *own* analysis of the role of the Bantustans in the perpetuation of apartheid, and the particular role played by “traditional leaders”, the unelected chiefs, who were direct beneficiaries of the apartheid system, this strategy was somewhat odd.

Hyman has asked, “What gains represent inroads into capitalist control of production, and what gains lead rather to the incorporation of workers and their organisations within capitalist hegemony?”⁵⁰¹ He answers that “A factor of critical importance is the manner in which such reforms are achieved” where “invasion, not admission should be the unionists’ watchword”.⁵⁰² The above examples, I would argue, are examples in which reforms were sought by admission rather than invasion. It is also congruent with Fosatu’s tendency to legalism and political caution (see following section). In this aspect, then, the workerist strategy deviates specifically from syndicalism, which stresses the self-emancipation of the class through direct action, precisely because “the peoples owe all the political rights and privilege... not to the goodwill of their governments but to their own strength”.⁵⁰³ This thread in workerism, of a “politics of engagement”, derived in part from the failure by workerists to systematically adequately deal with long-term strategic questions. It *coexisted with, even though it contradicted*, the quasi-syndicalist strand of Fosatu; such a coexistence of quasi-syndicalist and social democratic positions underlines the vague way in which long-term strategy was handled.

Tuacc and Fosatu’s willingness to “engage” in, in order to reform, state institutions was also sharply different from its hard-line approach to the UDF, with which Fosatu rejected any affiliation. If it was acceptable to engage with an oppressive state, in order to reform it, then there were no solid grounds to refuse participation in a largely working class mass movement like the UDF - which had in any case many currents akin to workerism - on the grounds that it was imperfect. To put this another way: participation in the state posed severe threats to Fosatu, as it openly recognised on the ICs issue, yet participation took place *anyway*, on the

⁴⁹⁹ Khanyile. 1982. “What is a Trade Union” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 85

⁵⁰⁰ HP: AH 1999 C1.6. Recommendations from the Strategy Seminar held on the 17th and 18th March 1985, p. 4

⁵⁰¹ Haysom, “In Search of”, p. 50

⁵⁰² *ibid*

⁵⁰³ Rocker, *Anarcho Syndicalism*, p. 75

grounds that it would open space. It was therefore highly inconsistent to reject participation in the UDF on what were, as shown in Chapter 6, really quite small issues – especially when Fosatu participation would almost certainly have strengthened and democratised the UDF. Therefore workerism was inconsistent with its “engagist” approach, as with the application of its critique – a further example of its inconsistency, itself arising from a characteristically action-first, pragmatic approach that entailed a lack of long-term strategic planning.

8.4.4. Direct Action versus Legal Action

Although the workerist leaders in Fosatu stressed the benefits of direct action,⁵⁰⁴ any definition of workerism neglecting the extent to which workerists made use of the law and the skills of their legal team, would be incomplete. For Webster, a large part of the legacy of workerism is its “capacity” to distinguish principles from tactics, and to be flexible in its use of the latter.⁵⁰⁵ The willingness of workerist leaders to make use of the courts, which was based on their assessment of the state as a contested and contradictory site, was justified on the grounds that engaging in legal struggle was a *tactical* issue only, and thus not rejected by workerists in principle. No contradiction was perceived in an approach that juxtaposed struggle from below (and direct action) with obtaining reforms from above, and workerists therefore clearly envisaged a central role for institutions such as the courts in transformation.

Thus Fosatu’s strategy, although recognising that “there are also real dangers in relying *too much* on the law – because a lot of things cannot be resolved by the law – e.g. wages”, also held that “Experience has shown that to depend *only* on internal organisation within a factory can also be a problem”.⁵⁰⁶ The conclusion therefore was that “workers have to use every resource available to them”,⁵⁰⁷ including for example, the newly reconstituted ICs and even the “independent judiciary and the normal courts”, which Fosatu stressed should not be “replaced” by the ICs.⁵⁰⁸ Fosatu “legalism” included, as an example, the Numsa (previously Mawu) leadership and its legal team putting in “an action against PW Botha as state president” in an “attempt by Fosatu to have the 1986 state of emergency declared *ultra*

⁵⁰⁴ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 80

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁰⁶ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.17.5.3. Organisers Course 1984, first emphasis mine, second emphasis original

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁰⁸ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.1. Fosatu CC statement on the Amended Industrial Conciliation Act, in *Fosatu Worker News* November 1979.

varies, that is beyond his power and law”.⁵⁰⁹ Although unsuccessful, this attempt demonstrates a significant show of confidence in the potential of the courts, not to mention a certain naiveté regarding the state’s repressive nature. Nevertheless, Fosatu often praised “the success [it] has had in the courts”, the talents of its legal team, and the recognition it got as a result.⁵¹⁰

Therefore Fosatu *concurrently* urged direct action *and* legal action (“a mix of legal pressure and propaganda pressure”⁵¹¹). The reference cited earlier in which Fosatu claimed that “nowhere” in history had a change in law led to recognition⁵¹² is a case in point. Likewise, Fosatu critiqued workers in the ICU for thinking “that the ICU would act as their saviour and were never told that it was only they that could save themselves by building a strong organisation”.⁵¹³ By 1985, when Fosatu also began advocating factory occupations and “*siyalalas*”, or sleep-in strikes.⁵¹⁴ But at the same time, it made extensive use of its legal team in winning reforms – in some cases, “postponing” the “idea of mass action” pending results from the ICs.⁵¹⁵

There are numerous parallels between the workerist and a social democratic approach in regard to this legalism: in the perception of the state as a site of significant contestation, giving rise to a struggle *inside* its institutions; in its efforts to extend and “democratise” liberal democratic institutions like the courts as an important aspect of the transformation process.⁵¹⁶ Thus, we have here an uneasy coexistence between quasi-syndicalist and social democratic strands.

8.4.5. The “Frontier of Control”: beyond the Sphere of Production

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2010, Johannesburg. In fact, the unions were surprisingly successful in the courts. An article published in the Fosatu Press Digest (FPD) not employers that had taken “a canning from unions”. (LRS Trade Union Library. Salha 8c2: Fosatu. *FPD*. “Employers Fight Back”, 6th May 1984)

⁵¹⁰ HP: AH 2065 D4.2. Fosatu Annual Report - 1982. March 1983, p. 37. Also see HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.3. “Miners’ Court Victory” in *Fosatu Worker News*, November 1985, No. 45, p. 8; HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.3. “Victimization – Employer Found Guilty” in *Fosatu Worker News*, 9th edn. December 1981

⁵¹¹ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.1.1.2.2. Minutes of the Fosatu Central Committee, 26th and 27th July 1980

⁵¹² HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16.1.1. “Registration – the big test” in *Fosatu Worker News*, February 1980

⁵¹³ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.3. *Fosatu Worker News*. 1985. “The Making of the Working Class, Part 11: “The ICU collapses”, October edn.

⁵¹⁴ The Cosatu workers Diary of 1986 actually claims that these occupations “pose the question: who controls the factory, the boss or the workers?” and testifies to the strategy of encroaching control described earlier.

⁵¹⁵ Baskin, J. 1982. ‘Growth of a New’ p. 48

⁵¹⁶ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

Workerists were likewise concerned to expand the sphere of control by the subaltern classes “beyond workplace issues into the sphere of reproduction”.⁵¹⁷ Pushing back the “frontier of control” beyond the sphere of production was therefore involved other aspects of social life, with the cultural sphere specifically prioritised. The question requiring an answer is *how* workerists anticipated its achievement, and, here various options present themselves. The first would be via direct involvement by Fosatu, perhaps through collaboration with organisations based in the “reproductive sphere” – or by the federation alone. An alternative approach would be indirect involvement. The workerists were reluctant to involve themselves directly in issues not directly related to the shopfloor workers struggle,⁵¹⁸ for fear of diverting the limited resources available to them, and attracting unnecessary and unwanted state attention. They thus adopted the second approach, of indirect involvement.

Their strategy is reminiscent of the question on “organic intellectuals” (See section 8.4.2.3). It revolved primarily around training a cadre of effective and class-conscious worker leaders that could pass on their expertise and knowledge to a broader constituency in a larger environment (“in the communities that surround the industrial areas”).⁵¹⁹ Thus the federation itself would not be *formally* involved (relieving itself of the demanding task of organising communities or directly shaping community struggles), in the hope that its cadre would do so anyway.

In practice this implied that “locals” or shop steward councils could influence township politics, but Fosatu would not affiliate to the UDF as such. But attempts to have a wider influence were not to be restricted to education and vague hopes that Fosatu cadre would shape other movements. The development of the shop stewards councils was important in concretely bridging the gap between the trade unions and the working class community, and in involving unions in issues that extended into non-trade union struggles.⁵²⁰ This included struggles over basic amenities and rights – such as the “the absence of roads”, the “lack of education and many other things that actually are paid for by the economy”.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg; Webster, *Cast in a Racial*, p. 279; See also HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 31

⁵¹⁸ Fosatu’s policy was that these sorts of issues would be tackled only if they were an impediment to the workers’ struggle.

⁵¹⁹ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 117

⁵²⁰ *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Lectures for Workers”, p. 35

⁵²¹ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

So, if the shop stewards councils provided a vehicle through which workers were able to draw Fosatu more directly into community struggles, as noted in Chapter 7, the shop stewards councils *also* provided *Fosatu* with a means to contest the direction of community struggles. As was described in Chapter 7, the emergence of the shop stewards councils must be seen as the practical realisation of an embryonic strategy *already constituted by workerist leaders*. This is because they already imagined such organs as intrinsically compatible with their notions of worker control of the trade union, while at the same time *providing a vehicle* for extending worker control beyond into the sphere of community.

Some workerists even claimed that the structures of township “people’s power” (see Ch. 6, esp. 6.8) were evidence of the impact of Fosatu-style organising,⁵²² because its worker leaders “[were] the people who encouraged the formation of the civic organisations”.⁵²³ Sauls concurs, seeing worker leaders as being in the “forefront” of struggles in the community.⁵²⁴ Likewise, Fanaroff argues that “a lot of the community organisations” especially in Alexandra and the East Rand townships and the forerunners to the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) “were built up very largely by trade union members and organisers” who “had a tradition of organising that wasn’t present” in the BCM or the ANC. Thus if you “go back and look at the history of the Alexandra civics” and the street committees emerging out of them, you would see that those initiating these structures “were led by a lot of... trade union people like Moss [Mayekiso], to build up those street level structures based on the way in which we were organised into the factories”.⁵²⁵

The strategy of expanding the sphere of control outside the factory involved building a culture of, and expertise in, democratic organisation. In this way, experienced trade unionists, schooled in effective and accountable organising, and familiar with “practices” such as mandates and report-backs should be “the basis for democratic organisation both within the areas of production and of social consumption (the community)”.⁵²⁶ Citing the work of Dlamini, for example, the *South African Labour Bulletin* described at the time how “zone committees were also seen as a means of extending the organisational skills learnt in the trade

⁵²² Also see Von Holdt, “Trade Unions, Community Organisations” for a remarkable study of the crossover between the Fosatu locals and community organisations in the East Rand. In Alexandra, the role of Moses Mayekiso and his brother Mzwanele Mayekiso in fostering street committee-type structures in the 1980s is well-established: See Jochelson. K. 1990. “Reform, Repression and”

⁵²³ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁵²⁴ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁵²⁵ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁵²⁶ Erwin, “The Question of Unity”, p. 55

union to the sphere of community.⁵²⁷ Fosatu used the slogan “each one teach one” which implied “blurring of boundaries between educator and learner: since everyone possessed rich experience of life, every worker was regarded as both learner and educator”.⁵²⁸

If a conception of encroaching control in the workplace implied a strategy in which the democratic structures of the trade unions could prefigure the democratic organs of self-government in post-capitalist society, then their community counterpart should be perceived in these organs of popular power. The latter at times aspired to move from protest to actually governing the townships⁵²⁹ as Barrett has noted: “by the mid-80s already the notion of dual power in the townships was beginning to emerge”.⁵³⁰

This aspect highlights the many baseless accusations levelled at the workerists: that they were economistic,⁵³¹ that they downplayed the political struggles in the townships⁵³² or that they were narrowly focussed on the trade unions as the “only organisational base”.⁵³³ This also contradicts the view that workerism failed to see that working class leadership be exercised on all fronts of struggle,⁵³⁴ that they were reluctant to form alliances with groups other than workers,⁵³⁵ or even that they engaged in struggles outside the workplace but “as unionists”.⁵³⁶ Rather it seems to verify Ritchken’s assessment – which highlights the “subtle links” between shopfloor and broader demands.⁵³⁷

Again, however, workerism showed its tendency to be vague on long-term strategy. So even though there “was an increasing sort of recognition of... the power of these institutions” amongst workerists it was doubtful that “people projected meaning... of state transformation onto those institutions; those organisations”.⁵³⁸ Clearly therefore, these notions were only embryonic and not translated into a coherent strategy, and Fosatu fell back upon an indirect approach, keeping its focus on the shop floor: “Fosatu believes... workers will become a

⁵²⁷ *South African Labour Bulletin*B, “Lectures for Workers”, p. 35

⁵²⁸ *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Lectures for Workers”, p. 35

⁵²⁹ Neocosmos, “From People’s Politics to”; Jochelson, “Reform, Repression and”

⁵³⁰ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁵³¹ Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 80

⁵³² Dwyer, “South Africa under the ANC”, p. 204

⁵³³ Isizwe, “Errors of Workerism”, p. 57

⁵³⁴ Cronin cited in Mosenthal, “Flight from Class”, p. 66; Isizwe, *op. cit.*, p. 62

⁵³⁵ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 432

⁵³⁶ Pillay, “Cosatu, the SACP and”, p. 9

⁵³⁷ Ritchken, “Trade Unions and”, p. 41

⁵³⁸ *ibid*

power in their own right in the community if they harness their real power and that is their strength – the factories”.⁵³⁹

In the face of accusations that workerists were unconcerned with the struggles of other oppressed strata, Fosatu shop steward Nkosi Mkalipi explained that Fosatu’s stress on independence did “not mean that we ignore the unemployed or unorganised workers”.⁵⁴⁰ The question was rather “*how* we can use the strength of the organised workers to assist in building the unity of all sections of the oppressed and exploited to bring about change”.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, Foster insisted “We are also concerned with worker leadership in a wider arena than only that of the union struggle”⁵⁴² but that “giving leadership” to the whole working class requires an organisational base⁵⁴³ or “nucleus”;⁵⁴⁴ something which the unions could readily and most effectively provide because “their power is pivotal if we were to lead a revolution, a mass revolution”.⁵⁴⁵ However, this leadership was as noted above, operationalised in quite a vague way: an *indirect* impact on other working class constituencies, and autonomy from the UDF. This is not to say it was an unimportant way of operating, only that it was limited. Leading a “mass revolution” requires something more concrete.

8.4.6. Unions vs. Parties

So far, it has been argued that workerism lacked a clear strategy for the achievement of its stated goals of bringing down apartheid and capitalism and erecting in its place a democratic society run on socialist principles. Rather, it had contradictory thrusts co-existing, and had a manifestly inconsistent application of principles. This is also apparent with regard to its views on what role, if any, political parties should play in the hoped-for transformation.

Fosatu policy stipulated a rejection of alliances with all political parties.⁵⁴⁶ However, the question of whether some sort of political organisation might be linked to Fosatu at some

⁵³⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.1.1.2.3, Draft Resolution of Policy Proposed by the Fosatu Executive, p. 1

⁵⁴⁰ *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Interview with Nkosi Mkalipi”, p. 84, my emphasis

⁵⁴¹ *ibid*

⁵⁴² HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3.10. “The Workers Struggle”, p. 33

⁵⁴³ *ibid*

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁴⁶ However, Fosatu also “eschewed involvement in national political issues and refused to align themselves publicly to any political movement” (Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 80), including movements of the popular classes such as the UDF, which is less typical of mainstream syndicalism.

point remained an open one. The positions held by workerists on this issue were vague, there were a range of views, and the federation, when pushed, took an ambiguous position to these issues. This of course, partly explains much of the confusion in the secondary literature on whether workerist wanted to launch a political party or not, and if so, of what sort (see Ch. 2, esp. 2.2.2).

A political party need not imply a vanguard party. It could be a mass, reformist party like the Brazilian PT or the Eurocommunist PCI, PCF and PCE. It could equally be an anarchist or syndicalist political organisation. The Spanish CNT had, within it, a specific anarchist political organisation, the Anarchist Federation of Iberia (FAI), which defended and promoted anarchism against rival tendencies within the federation, including social democrats and Marxists. Bakunin himself, active in the International Workingmen's Association (the "First International"), formed the anarchist International Alliance of Socialist Democracy to mobilise a bloc against the Blanquists, Marxists and Mutualists.

Like many on the New Left, workerists tended to a position that downplayed parties. As Buhle, for example, shows of the rise of the New Left in the United States, "disillusioned communists returned to a 'union-first' vision that resembled syndicalism in practice if not in name".⁵⁴⁷ Similarly, Renton claims that there was a tense relationship to the question of political organisation in the New Left that manifested in ambivalence over the question of the revolutionary vanguard party.⁵⁴⁸ The above comments could easily be applied to the workerists.

Thus, there was a certain workerist scepticism towards left parties in general, derived in part from the New Left. But Fosatu's official policy of independence from parties was also contextually derived. The context related partly to the oppressiveness of the apartheid state, which made the outward identification with left-wing political parties very risky. There was also a political criticism of the ANC, SACP and the BCM at play; this is demonstrated by Fosatu's view that there are "problems in the relationship of a worker organisation to a political party that is not made up wholly of workers".⁵⁴⁹ There was also a very clear fear that

⁵⁴⁷ Buhle, 2010. 2011. "Syndicalism in the United States" in *Socialist History*, No. 37, p. 17

⁵⁴⁸ Renton, *Dissident Marxism*. As noted, rejection of a Leninist party is not tantamount to rejection of political organisation, as the CNT/ FAI and the First International/ Bakuninist Alliance shows. Renton tends to conflate the two, as he treats a Leninist party as the basic form of a revolutionary political organisation.

⁵⁴⁹ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Organisations, p. 6

the union movement could become a “transmission belt” for a political party, and so alienate large section of the workforce that don’t identify with it, sowing division in the working class.⁵⁵⁰ (This was a notable problem in KwaZulu where many workers, especially migrants, identified with Buthelezi’s Inkhatha Party, the Zulu nationalist party that ran the homeland.)

However, while all workerist leaders had a “union-first vision”, there were some – by no means all – who flirted with the idea of a workers’ political party. Many of my respondents suggested either that the “logic” of Fosatu was the formation of a workers’ party,⁵⁵¹ or that there was an eventual possibility of being linked to a workers party that could articulate a “clear line” with a view to capturing state power.⁵⁵² The way the problem was formulated – and the fact that the issue was displaced into the future – suggests a fundamental *disinterest or indifference* to the question of a workers’ party, because serious discussion of the issue was never actually undertaken.

Fosatu did not oppose traditional-style political parties, which aimed to use the state, *in principle*.⁵⁵³ This puts workerism – in general – at odds with syndicalism; the Bakuninist Alliance and the FAI of the CNT were political organisations, but not parties in the sense above. Their function has typically revolved around the promulgation of *ideas* and *strategy*, promoting a specific ideological and organisational current within the larger movements of the popular classes.⁵⁵⁴ Independence from mainstream political parties is, on the other hand, for syndicalists not a simple tactical concern, but rejected on principle.⁵⁵⁵ This is because the state cannot, from this perspective, be used to change society in a progressive way; participation in this apparatus of class domination corrupts parties, labour, Communist and otherwise, and achieves no real gains for the masses.

There was a spectrum of views amongst the workerists on the issue of whether Fosatu should be linked to some sort of party. From my interviews, I have discerned three broad positions –

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁵⁵¹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁵² HP: AH 1999 C.4. Background to the Meeting between Fosatu Executive and the UDF, p. 7

⁵⁵³ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 12th June 2009, Johannesburg

⁵⁵⁴ The CNT-FAI is a good example

⁵⁵⁵ DeLeonism had an idiosyncratic position. It hoped to win elections in order to dissolve the state.

although of course, as Motala asserted, “seemingly hard and fast positions didn’t exist on the ground like that at all, they were much more fluid”.⁵⁵⁶

At the one end of the scale were those who rejected political parties. Sauls envisioned the emergence of a separate “vehicle”, not a party, which would co-exist “with workers but with workers in a formation, and it would not be a trade union” but “some sort of other formation and in alliance with other forces”.⁵⁵⁷ Horn identified as part of a group of socialists of the “syndicalist-type” which meant that “we didn’t link our political agenda to a political party”, and that “we believed that we could build up worker control under trade unions and we were not looking at the formation of a political party”.⁵⁵⁸ Bonner likewise claimed that “Fosatu would be it” i.e. “the party”:

It would perform the functions. But I mean I guess something more specialised would have to come into existence at some point... I certainly didn’t want a communist party, a new communist party, of sort of selected clandestine people, which pulled the strings behind the scenes... And so then the compromise we reached was that Fosatu would be it, you know, I guess the NEC of Fosatu, the leading organs of Fosatu, [or a “new committee”], because you know, it’s got to be directed from somewhere.⁵⁵⁹

This position seems to correspond with the position taken by Foster in the famous 1982 speech, where he stated that

We believe that FOSATU must set itself the task of giving leadership and direction to the building of a working class movement [defined as a network of “large-scale organisations with a clear social and political identity as the working class”]... FOSATU as a trade union federation will clearly not constitute the working class movement nor would this place FOSATU in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement.⁵⁶⁰

Horn argued that while the workerists “were aware of the formation of the Workers’ Party in Brazil” and “found it an interesting thing what had happened in Brazil”, but they “were not

⁵⁵⁶ Telephone interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg. See also Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory*, p. 25

⁵⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁵⁸ Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁶⁰ Foster, “The Worker’s struggle”, p. 101

trying to do that”.⁵⁶¹ Sauls also stated that when the topic of a workers party was raised, it was “just smashed by Bernie Fanaroff and them”.⁵⁶²

The next position, which was more influential, included Adler, Dube, Webster, Fanaroff, Barrett, Motala and Copelyn, thought a party might emerge later, but was not a priority. They stressed the primary importance of building up the unions, and were distrustful of the party form, but did not oppose it on principle. Many felt that the natural extension of the Fosatu position was a workers party, which would grow out of the workers movement and remain accountable to it, although no one “had a very clear idea of what it would be”.⁵⁶³ They did not necessarily even themselves actively push this agenda, or see themselves being involved in this process, and most typically “didn’t see that as a strategic priority at the time”.⁵⁶⁴

Adler, as a typical example, argued that “you needed to try and protect worker interests, and out of that *may* come another, uh... a party”, but that this would only happen if workers were “strong enough” and wanted to form their own party “in their own interest at some point in time”.⁵⁶⁵ For Fanaroff (somewhat contradicting Sauls’ recollection, cited above, on “Fanaroff and them”), that there was “an idea that eventually a worker’s party would emerge”.⁵⁶⁶ These workerists rejected the ANC and SACP, not on the basis that they were political parties *per se*, but on the basis that they were the *wrong* sort of political party for workers. Adler thus noted that there was a “lurking discussion” about “a worker’s party in the sort of classical Leninist mode”,⁵⁶⁷ and debate about whether the SACP “could be it”, but that his “sense of the sentiment at the time, is that we were generally scornful of x and y agencies,” meaning the ANC and SACP.⁵⁶⁸

Barrett likewise remembered “an implicit and sometimes explicit reference to” a workers’ party,⁵⁶⁹ and Motala claimed that the “alternative to the nationalist movement would have been “to consider forming a workers’ party... at some stage”,⁵⁷⁰ although he also maintained

⁵⁶¹ Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁶² Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁵⁶³ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg; Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town; Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁶⁴ Adler, *op. cit.*, Johannesburg

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶⁶ Fanaroff, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁶⁸ Adler, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶⁹ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁷⁰ Telephone Interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

that at the time “we were very much opposed to a political party position”.⁵⁷¹ For Webster, the “Workers’ party of Brazil”, which had “at that stage... grown out of the labour movement” was of particular historical significance and a possible reference point for future activity for workerists.⁵⁷²

Dube’s assessment was that because “we did not create the political parties in South Africa”, but rather “found them”, that therefore “it is possible... that had Fosatu been given a longer period of existence, the question of going it alone to the extent of forming a working class organisation [meaning here, a party] cannot be ruled out”.⁵⁷³ However, while “those kind of questions were there” it “certainly didn’t develop into a more formalised thing about well, we’ll move from the trade union to a party – or we’ll overthrow the state”.⁵⁷⁴

It must be noted that even this “pro”-party group was often inclined to a semi-syndicalist position. Despite the fact that many in this group did not reject political parties *per se*, their own strategic thinking around eclipsing apartheid capitalism and creating a democratic socialist society, made little or no room for political parties. This is evident in the “deep distrust of party politics” described by Webster as common to many workerists,⁵⁷⁵ and in Dube’s argument that parties “have their own party political agenda: remaining in power, in control of the resources, and using the resources to control everybody and everything else”.⁵⁷⁶

Fanaroff’s strategy, too, revolved around the notion that “if you can take control of the key industries, then you have control of the state”, although he admits that “it was just vague and, you know, unthought-through at that stage”.⁵⁷⁷ For Fanaroff, “the way to take down the apartheid state” was by “building up a huge strong movement in the factories” through which workers could “take control” of major industries including the “coal mines and the power stations”.

The last group comprised those respondents who specifically supported the idea of forming/aligning of the federation to a political party. This includes Mayekiso, Foster, Erwin

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁷² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁷³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth. Unlike Bonner and Sauls, Dube is referring to a political “organisation” in the statist, party-political sense.

⁵⁷⁴ Adler, *op. cit*

⁵⁷⁵ Webster, *op. cit*.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

and Dlamini – although the latter was not a workerist. All respondents identified the advocacy of the workers’ party with Mayekiso, and Mayekiso explicitly advocated this line in an interview in 1985.⁵⁷⁸ While Erwin agreed with the workerist line that “our objective was to unify workers and organise them as the priority to establish a worker power”, he also argued that “Joe Foster’s speech was essentially saying that your first task is to consolidate the strength of the worker movement, and out of that you would either have an alliance with the ANC... or... the SACP changed”, or that “some new form” would emerge.⁵⁷⁹ In his own view, this meant “that the trade union movement should essentially be linked either to a powerful working class party of a communist type, or at the minimum of a really strong social democratic party (which the ANC could not be)”.⁵⁸⁰ Foster likewise stated that “I mean the trade union is not a political party and cannot be a political party” and that therefore “you need a political party”, although he felt that this political party “can be controlled by the union”.⁵⁸¹

The issues discussed were never really resolved; they were never really formulated into a coherent strategy, which explains the sort of ambivalence about the future pervasive in workerism. What is important to recognise, however, is that all workerists agreed that trade unions should be primary and central in the anti-capitalist struggle. They were understood to be the “vehicle for major industrial and political change”.⁵⁸² While many did not rule out a future role for some sort of workers political organisation, most displayed indifference to the issue and almost none saw this as a priority. The ambivalent and contradictory responses are, however, important in illustrating that Fosatu’s workerists had not thought through the longer term strategic problems facing the movement.

Such an approach deviates profoundly from orthodox Marxism-Leninism, under which unions are denigrated for their limited prospects and reformist nature, and thus given a secondary role to the party in the anti-capitalist struggle. At the same time, within workerism is an impulse in the direction of syndicalism, evoking the position of the early British Shop Stewards’ Movement, where “industrial unionism” was “the main agent of social change”

⁵⁷⁸ Alexander, “Towards a Workers’ Party”

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2010, Cape Town. It should be noted that this comment might be testimony to the “fallibility of memory” cited earlier, given that Erwin was central to the writing of the 1982 Foster speech, which takes very different positions, especially with regards to the ANC.

⁵⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

⁵⁸² Bonner, “The Independent Unions since”, p. 16

and “the shell of the new society” to be created “within the old”.⁵⁸³ However, workerism tended to stop short of thoroughgoing, full-blown syndicalism, and this is evident in the unclear positions on the issue of political parties. This lack of clarity was also indicative of their general failure to formulate coherent strategy for long-term revolutionary (?) change.

With its “union-first” vision, unresolved strategy and ambivalence on the party question, workerism is in fact quite typical of the New Left – willing to casually cast off the doctrinal conclusions so rigidly held by the Old Left in favour of a more pragmatic, present tense and action-oriented approach, and more concerned with “grassroots” organisation than a vanguardist and predetermined solution to the fight for socialism. To the extent that it had a syndicalist strand, this is best seen as “quasi-syndicalist” only.

8.4.7. Alliances outside the Workplace

Fosatu took an independent position, refusing to join the UDF, rejecting affiliation to the ANC and SACP, and remaining rather vague on whether it should form its own party. However, this does not exhaust the question of alliances outside the workplace, which might be considered by a union. Besides capital, the state and mainstream political parties, there are community and social movement groups, often representing popular/working class constituencies and issues. These include issue-based associations, women’s and youth groups, movements of the unemployed etc., as well as (in many countries) other oppressed classes and their formations like the peasantry.⁵⁸⁴

Any policy of independence can be at once, principled, strategic, or tactical. Fosatu’s policy on independence was all of these: tactical because it was contextually derived, and contingent on the particular constraints of the South African political vista; strategic because it was designed for the growth and consolidation of unions in the pursuit of rights and benefit under capitalism and for its eventual breakdown and overthrow; and principled (as described in section 8.4.2.6). But it was also rooted in historical analysis – and related to all the above-mentioned organisational forms.

⁵⁸³ Cl@ss War Classix, “Editorial Introduction”

⁵⁸⁴ Of course there is also the rather straightforward question of unorganised workers and the slightly less straightforward issue of the peasantry. Clearly the workerist answer to unorganised workers would be organise them – although this would obviously have been done in line with the conception of strategic sectors. With regards the peasantry, although workerists regarded them as “allies which one would have to work with” (Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town), they were not seen as key players in the struggle and no attempt was made to make contact with peasants.

8.4.7.1. The Question of the ANC, the UDF and the National Forum

As noted, then, official Fosatu policy enshrined its independence from *all* political parties, but this was often not a decision based on a principled rejection to parties as such – even if many were deeply sceptical of political parties. As discussed above, there was no formal or common position on this principle.

However, there was a shared antipathy to the ANC and SACP, which informed the workerist tendency to reject alliances with parties generally, and the Congress movement, specifically. The workerists lamented the fact that “Sactu could not impose a sufficient working class direction on the ANC”⁵⁸⁵ in the 1950s. Sactu’s decision to enter into a formal alliance with the ANC was perceived as a way to “increase its membership and its strength”.⁵⁸⁶ But Fosatu stressed that “later writers and trade unionists” had shown the incorrectness of this strategy, which resulted in Sactu’s subordination “to non working class interests in the alliance”⁵⁸⁷ and the retrogression of the workers struggle in the medium-term.⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, in his 1982 speech, Foster underlined that the ANC’s links to the Soviet bloc in the Cold War, along with its fear of being seen as too “communist” by the US bloc, prevented the adoption by the party of more far-reaching worker-oriented policies. This also warned against the desirability of forging of a closer alliance with the ANC.

Another consequence of Sactu’s formal participation in an alliance with the ANC and SACP, it was argued, was undue external influences – given the “the ability of those who gave support to the ANC to influence its policies”.⁵⁸⁹ Since this support was from the East bloc, there was a tendency for “Sactu members associated with emerging trade unions” to be “concerned mainly to recruit people to leave the country for military training”.⁵⁹⁰ This diverted people away from the internal struggle, towards the agenda of the ANC’s leadership, its backers, and its objective of capturing state power. The dismal record of African nationalist parties post-independence with regard to workers and trade unions was also a consideration. Almost all of these regimes adopted anti-worker economic policies, and

⁵⁸⁵ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1. “The Making of the Working Class, part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance” in *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, p. 3

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁹ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1. “The Making of the Working Class, part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance” in *Fosatu Worker News*, October 1985, p. 3

⁵⁹⁰ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements, p. 8

undertook the “muzzling” of unions.⁵⁹¹ This prospect was seen as a very real threat to the future of the workers’ struggle. Sactu’s situation in exile, where it was less a union than a wing of the ANC, suggested that the ANC was unlikely to be much different.

In response to these issues, and with the view to preventing a similar outcome in South Africa, the workerist tendency set out to “create a buffer against nationalist takeover”.⁵⁹² This meant, in practice, remaining independent while not necessarily precluding collaboration with political parties on an issue-by-issue basis. (For more on the issue of alliances, see the next section).

Of course, this position was not shared by all Fosatu leaders – but it was the position of the workerists. They tended to believe that the apartheid government was “not going anywhere soon” and that therefore there was “certainly time to build socialism” – as a solution to both racial domination and capitalist exploitation.⁵⁹³ It is here that we can clearly demarcate workerist and non-workerist leadership elements in Fosatu. As Mashishi noted, while “people like Moss Mayekiso, John Copelyn, Alec Erwin ... Joe Foster”, all workerists, subscribed to the “sort of thinking that we don’t have to get involved in politics” like the ANC, opposition could be found in “people like Enoch Godongwana, [Andrew] Zulu... [and] Chris Dlamini”, all pro-ANC, and not workerist.⁵⁹⁴

The workerist insistence on autonomy, with the federation’s decisions being democratically undertaken by members and not by outsiders, was also applied to other alliances. As noted in chapter 6, workerism did not dismiss politics or alliances. However, it wanted autonomy, with cooperation based on clear, defined goals. Thus, one problem regarding the UDF as a coordinating body was its “general character”, which, it was argued, “creates difficulties... in defining a clear line, something which a political party, e.g., would more easily be able to do”.⁵⁹⁵

In addition, as previously noted, “the UDF was seen as a populist organisation as opposed to a worker organisation, or a workerist organisation” – multi-class, and too closely linked to

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁹² Holgate, P. 1961. “Aspects of syndicalism in Spain, Sweden and U.S.A.” in *Anarchy*, No.2, p. 24

⁵⁹³ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁹⁵ HP: AH 1999 C.4. Background to the Meeting between Fosatu Executive and the UDF, p. 7

the ANC.⁵⁹⁶ It was therefore not what “we would have liked to see – a proletarian revolutionary movement”.⁵⁹⁷ Rather, it was claimed, the UDF leadership was predominantly petit bourgeoisie, comprising “high profile experienced politicians” from “party political organisations” which had “first and foremost a party political interest”.⁵⁹⁸ This meant that Fosatu perceived there to be “substantial opposition in the UDF to the trade unions becoming the dominant force in that organisation”.⁵⁹⁹

Furthermore, the structure of the UDF was seen to be undemocratic and lacking in accountability, comprising “a loose gathering of people” which in no way mirrored the unions where “you had departments inside the factory and you had a shop steward”, and the shop steward was “answerable” to the constituency he/she represented and “could always be called to account”.⁶⁰⁰

Outside of the UDF was an alternative, called the National Forum, formed in 1983, as a rival pole of attraction to the UD. the National Forum was a coalition of BCM groups, PAC supporters, and Trotskyists. In line with the “scientific socialism” of second-generation BCM groups like Azapo, and of the Trotskyists, it adopted a “Manifesto of the Azanian People” which advocated “a democratic, antiracist worker Republic in Azania”.⁶⁰¹ The workerists do not seem to have seriously considered joining the National Forum. In the first place, the Forum was “not a permanently structured organisation” but a “loose association of groups whose representatives met periodically”.⁶⁰² It had, then, the same looseness that Fosatu found so objectionable in the UDF. BCM leaders tended to be viewed as middle class, and, in any case, the National Forum, with its BC links, would have had closer affinities with the UTP/Cusa tradition than with Tuace/Fosatu non-racialism. Finally, the workerists, as previously indicated, tended to steer clear of formations that could be seen as closely aligned to particular parties, because it alienated union members whose sympathies lay elsewhere.⁶⁰³

All of these are legitimate concerns, which could potentially present serious problems to worker organisation. However, as has been discussed elsewhere, they were also exaggerated.

⁵⁹⁶ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21 July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁵⁹⁸ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1 Advanced Course 1985, Document entitled “UDF”, p. 23

⁵⁹⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰⁰ Dube, *op. cit*

⁶⁰¹ National Forum, “Manifesto of the Azanian People”, p. 351

⁶⁰² Lodge and Nasson, *op. cit.*, p. 142-143

⁶⁰³ Dube, *op. cit.*; see also *South African Labour Bulletin*, “Unions and the UDF”, p. 5

For one, this draws attention to contradictions in Fosatu's praxis. If the UDF was undemocratic and its leadership dominated by petit bourgeois elements – both inflated claims, but valid concerns nonetheless – then why not work in the UDF to “transform” the from the inside? This would parallel early work in Tucsa, and the ways in which he motor unions had “democratised” the liaison committees, and indeed, the way Fosatu saw itself transforming the ICs – which were undoubtedly more decisively dominated by “capitalist elements” and decidedly less democratic at their best, than the UDF at its worst.

Given that workerist leaders *recognised* that “what was emerging in the mass movement... within the UDF structures... was an internal questioning of the ANC's position”,⁶⁰⁴ the decision to remain outside is all the more confusing. Others took this view at the time as well. Storey for example, showed how “the mass of the *supporters* of the UDF (overwhelmingly working class), *want* working class leadership of the struggle, want power to pass into the hands of the working class, *want* a program for a thorough-going democratic revolution”, with the result that Fosatu's refusal to engage “leaves these workers stranded in the UDF, under essentially middle class leadership”.⁶⁰⁵ Thus Fosatu was refusing “to do the one thing that would put the unorganised workers in a position to change the UDF and bring it under their control”.⁶⁰⁶

Fosatu's leadership had *considered* the possibility of working in the UDF, but felt that the unions were not yet strong enough to resist the nationalist sentiment. Thus in an internal paper dealing with the UDF, the authors ask “whether it is rather a question of timing” and thus whether Fosatu should consider “waiting until the working class organisation and consciousness is sufficiently developed to dominate a Front of this kind”.⁶⁰⁷

However, the workerist current had not devised a strategy for doing so, or an assessment of when this might be possible, and retained a general ambivalence (and a stance at odds with their willingness to engage elsewhere) towards the UDF. The result was, I would argue, that the UDF and the various structures established in its name, for which the unions were instrumental in establishing, were surrendered to the nationalist movement – precisely the

⁶⁰⁴ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁰⁵ Storey “Trade Unions and the UDF”, p. 13, emphasis original

⁶⁰⁶ Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 16

⁶⁰⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1 Advanced Course 1985, Document entitled “UDF”, p. 23

outcome workerist had endeavoured to avoid. However, this problematic outcome was inevitable *so long as* the workerists lacked a clear, coherent, long-term strategy.

8.4.7.2. The Unemployed, Community and Social Movement Groups

Van Der Walt and Schmidt identify several options for trade unions in relating to community, youth and women's groups etc.: to ignore them, "assuming their interests are represented", or to incorporate them into the unions, or to "ally with and otherwise promote specific organisations for these groups".⁶⁰⁸ In the early phase of Fosatu, most workerists in practice opted for the first option,⁶⁰⁹ because at this stage, "a very large part of our strategy" was to "build industrial strength" – which implied a strong focus on industrial unions.⁶¹⁰ Moreover, since Fosatu emerged in the wake of the massive repression of the revolts of 1976/1977, which marked a lull in township organising, this did not present an immediate problem given that very few notable community organisations were in operation before 1983. Thus, there was very little pressure to form alliances exerted on the Federation.

This "union-first" approach, if shaped by practical considerations, also had some expression as a current of thought throughout the Fosatu period. This stressed the idea that "we can achieve socialism if we *keep the class separate from other classes* that will water down the socialist mission".⁶¹¹ Given the failures of African nationalism on the continent, and given that nationalism replaces class with the nation as the basis of action, workerists therefore attempted to "ring fence workers from the broader nationalist history".⁶¹² It was felt that "a merger with the [nationalist] struggle" would permit "petit-bourgeois black elements" into the leadership – so that "things degenerate into a problem about race rather than class, you have no chance for socialism".⁶¹³

Fosatu even argued that "There has emerged into our political debate an empty and misleading political category called 'the community'" but that "All communities are composed of different interest groups".⁶¹⁴ Barrett recalls that some workerists put forward a

⁶⁰⁸ Van Der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 190

⁶⁰⁹ There were also attempts at the second option, although not in the Fosatu period. According to Mashishi, several ex-Fosatu leaders, after the formation of Cosatu, "fought for the formation of the unemployed workers union" (Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg).

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

⁶¹¹ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹³ Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹⁴ HP. AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. "The Workers Struggle", p. 35-36

position that churches and other civil society groups were not intrinsically working class, but rather multi-class, although she maintains that “there was also the recognition that there could be organisations outside of trade unions that would have predominantly working class constituencies”.⁶¹⁵ Some suggested, however, that alliances were not needed, in any case: Erwin recalled that “there were the [those] on the ultra left who were saying, forget everyone else, the workers can do it”.⁶¹⁶ An article in *Fosatu Worker News* reported that “We believe that workers as a class should fight their own problems. As the enemy is only one – capitalism – all other things like influx control are *merely appendages*”.⁶¹⁷

This position should *not* be conflated with economism, but rather, a general reluctance to engage in *structured alliances*. As I have shown, the Fosatu unions were *profoundly political*, fighting for the transformation of the workplace, the migrant labour system, and against the tricameral parliament. The point is that it tended to undertake these actions *independently*; it did not usually enter coalitions. When it joined the 1984 stayaway (or general strike), it supported the *demands* of the stayaway, but never formally *joined* any permanent coalition. Likewise, Fosatu, as noted earlier, hoped that its militants would influence township organisations through, for example, the “locals” or shop steward councils, but this influence would be *indirect*. Again, it did not involve itself formally or systematically or directly in shaping these organisations.

Therefore, accusations that “Workerism... seeks to isolate the workers”,⁶¹⁸ or that “they want to bypass the peoples’ revolutionary organisations, the ANC (SA) and Sactu”,⁶¹⁹ were quite true. But the claim often made next – that they were *therefore* apolitical, economistic or “yellow”, simply does not follow. Fosatu’s workerists wanted to be political, *without* being the wing of a political party; they were, in fact, a living refutation of the notion that unions are inherently economistic, or could only be political when allied to a political party.

The arrival of the UDF on the political scene, and the mushrooming of township organisations from 1983, fundamentally altered the socio-political terrain, and forced the workerist leaders to pay more attention to the issue of alliances. The previous union-first, go-

⁶¹⁵ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁶¹⁶ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁶¹⁷ Fosatu Worker News cited in Storey, “Trade Unions and the UDF” p. 12, my emphasis

⁶¹⁸ *Isizwe*. November 1986. “Errors of Workerism”, Vol. 1, No. 3

⁶¹⁹ “‘Direct Links’ – stinks!” in *Workers Unity*. 1982, April edn.

it-alone approach began to come under the spotlight. This opened up serious debate within the federation. Bonner recalls that “there were disagreements about community, and that meant from top to bottom. Like key intellectuals, for instance, would be on different sides of this one”.⁶²⁰

A Central Committee meeting in 1983 thus resolved to devote “a lot more time” to the issue of alliances, because it felt that “there was no defined manner in which Fosatu should relate to these local organisations”.⁶²¹ Later it was resolved that Fosatu would “examine its role in the community” and in so doing prioritise linkages with the “youth and the Fosatu locals”, in order to “win youth to a working class consciousness”.⁶²² By 1985, a resolution was reached to spend time with workers investigating “the history, policy and structure of such groupings” and then to “invite broad front political organisations such as the UDF to present talks” to Fosatu workers.⁶²³ In certain regions, Fosatu did start to formally collaborate with other bodies, including the UDF.⁶²⁴ However, the response was arguably too little, too late. Almost all respondents, speaking from position of hindsight, admitted “it was probably wrong not to see the need for alliances with other groups in society”.⁶²⁵

8.4.8. Reform vs. Revolution?

Workerism rejected capitalism. Its programme was centred on “socialist transformation”, which entailed “developing strongly independent workers power”, and “defining worker leadership” for the purposes of “change and transformation – revolutionary change actually, not just transformation as we talk about it today which can be a very nebulous term”.⁶²⁶ For Motala, “In those days there was no question about it, it was about revolutionary change”.⁶²⁷

If workerists were committed to revolution, the question that arises concerns the strategy envisioned to achieve such ends. Fosatu criticised the British Labour Party for falling “into the trap that their kind of leadership always fall into” and attempting “to convince workers there are easy ways to “power””.⁶²⁸ This suggests that attaining “power” involved

⁶²⁰ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶²¹ HP: AH 1999 D3.1. Summary of Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held 15/16th October 1983

⁶²² HP: AH 1999. C1.1.1 Report on the Fosatu National Policy Seminar, Wilgespruit, 28- 40th January 1985

⁶²³ HP: AH 1999: C1.7.3.17.3 Report from Fosatu Labour Studies Course 1985,

⁶²⁴ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11. Fosatu Press Statement 08/16

⁶²⁵ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009

⁶²⁶ Telephone interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg

⁶²⁷ *ibid*

⁶²⁸ HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.11 “The Workers Story”

independent and oppositional struggle, and not simply passive voting.⁶²⁹ However, the actual strategy adopted by all workerists was at times, as previously argued, rather akin to social democracy. Other authors have recognised this. For example, Bendix argued that although displaying “strong left features”, Fosatu’s willingness to “work within the capitalist framework” makes it “more a reformatory than revolutionary movement and places it within the perimeters of Western European democratic socialism”.⁶³⁰ Thus, in the same sense that workerists do not perceive an intrinsic contradiction between workers’ control and joint-control (see section 8.2.2), or counter-power and co-determination, so it seems that workerism also straddled the divide between a revolutionary and a reformist strategy.

For Mayekiso, capitalism had to be “corroded bit by bit” until it was done away.⁶³¹ Webster likewise claimed that “the idea was that you build up and shift the balance of power as a progressive building up of structures, but integrated into a long-term vision of transformation”.⁶³² Erwin explained that this view stemmed from the fact that “you could dictate that socialism would exist” – but that in order to do that you would “have to be oppressive and repressive” – which was antithetical to the workerist project.⁶³³ Rather, “collective power” could be built up to the point where “socialisation elements” were introduced, and “where the power in the state ... could now express more [working] class based power”.⁶³⁴

Clearly this entailed participation in various state and bargaining structures where possible, “balanced” by a grassroots movement strong enough to hold its leadership accountable. There are strong similarities with Guild Socialism and Eurocommunism here. The theory of “encroaching control”, for example, elaborated by the Guild Socialists, contains at its heart “the conception of revolution as a process rather than as an act”,⁶³⁵ emphasising “the possibility and even the necessity of inroads within capitalism as a basis for eventual transition to socialism”.⁶³⁶

⁶²⁹ The union-backed South African Labour Party formed in 1909 was similarly criticised for being “Never controlled by workers”; never “attempt[ing] to mobilise them except at elections” and becoming “Increasingly co-opted into structure of state” (See “The Workers Story”, *op. cit.*)

⁶³⁰ Bendix, S. 1983. “A Brief Overview”, p. 2

⁶³¹ Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

⁶³² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶³³ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁶³⁴ *ibid*

⁶³⁵ Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology, p. 47

⁶³⁶ *ibid*

This strategy could also be likened to that expounded by Poulantzas, adopted by Eurocommunists – and evidently by all workerists, wherein the “state is not a solid monolithic bloc that the masses ... have to destroy” but a “material condensation of a relation of classes”.⁶³⁷ This it was not an organisation of the ruling class but *internally contested between classes*. In this view, you could “struggle within the state” in order to “carry out a deep-seated transformation of the state”, without neglecting the need for “organs of popular power at the base, structures of direct democracy at the base”.⁶³⁸

This approach, with its basically social democratic view of the state as an instrument that can be wielded by multiple classes, and potentially one that could be reformed into socialism, was often presented in the Eurocommunist tradition as simply an application of Gramsci’s notion of a “war of position”. As seen in section 6.4, many workerists seemed to have this sort of theory of the state in mind – although, according to Bonner, it was understood as Gramscian.⁶³⁹

The workerists envisioned the “expansion of the sphere of workers’ control... massively... in every direction, politically and industrially” because it was seen to be “impossible to achieve a socialist transformation”⁶⁴⁰ without “sort of hollowing the thing out from inside”.⁶⁴¹ Clearly Fosatu envisioned this sort of erosion as deriving from militant and independent worker organisations, given its stress on direct action and worker control. But, another part of this revolved around the question of “how to democratise” that state and “make it accountable”,⁶⁴² which suggests parallel struggles “inside” and “outside” state institutions.

A strategy premised on massively expanding the sphere of workers’ control, or pushing back the frontier of control, and winning on-going reforms, is not in itself antithetical to one that emphasises the need for a climax, or revolutionary rupture in involving the expropriation of the ruling class. Syndicalists have long stressed the prerequisite of building up a counter-power capable of confronting the power of the ruling class, comprising both capital and the state, in anticipation of a revolutionary situation through winning reforms that empower workers. Council communists like Anton Pannekoek also stressed that “socialism could not

⁶³⁷ Weber, H. 1977. “The State and the Transition”, p. 4

⁶³⁸ *ibid*

⁶³⁹ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁶⁴¹ *ibid*

⁶⁴² Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

emerge from the gradual attainment of a parliamentary majority, but only from the steady erosion of the bourgeois state and the simultaneous creation of a proletarian counter-state through the process of mass action”.⁶⁴³

However, and this is crucial, syndicalists believe, firstly, that the construction of a counter-power is undertaken in *opposition* to the state and capital, and not through participation *within* corporate and state hierarchies; secondly, that reforms are won *from below*, through direct action; and that third, the construction of counter-power is only complete when the point is reached that the counter-power expropriates the ruling class of its political and economic power, *overwhelming* and *supplanting* through a revolutionary rupture.

It is on these issues that workerists did “not have one common position”, although they “were agreed that at the stage... we were far, far away”.⁶⁴⁴ The social democratic strand in Fosatu workerism, as we have seen, always coexisted with a quasi-syndicalist strand. On the issue of the need for revolution, Fosatu workerists again lacked a common position, and again tended to defer discussions of long-term strategy.

Bonner recalls a “fairly common idea” that “the putsch from the outside is useless because the internal relations are still essentially the same, and actually, the consciousness is still the same, so you should transform that”.⁶⁴⁵ Thus for Bonner, while “some sort of violence was likely to be there... I always objected to was the idea that you could have a revolutionary movement which would seize power in some sort of putsch, which is virtually what happened in Russia, where the whole terrain has not been completely developed and prepared”. Therefore “the final blow” would be directed at “something that was hollowed out from inside and was falling apart”. Nevertheless, for Bonner, “you’d need the final blow”.⁶⁴⁶ This suggests that there would be a rupture, but through a mass movement from below, not a small vanguard from above.

Erwin likewise recalled that “We had some debates in the very tense times” asking “could you go the insurrectionary road?” and that “some of us, myself included, argued it might be

⁶⁴³ Gerber, “From Left Radicalism”, p. 175, 184

⁶⁴⁴ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁴⁵ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁴⁶ *ibid*

possible”.⁶⁴⁷ Copelyn also made reference to “revolutionary” and “non-revolutionary times”.⁶⁴⁸ In fact, he argued in 1991 that he was “pessimistic” about the prospects for revolution given that “the economy remains a stable source of employment for millions of people (despite all its weaknesses), and the army remains absolutely unchallenged in its repressive capacity”.⁶⁴⁹ This assessment – rupture as not feasible in *current* conditions – suggests some conception of a period of rupture. A meeting of the Transvaal Coordinating Committee also resolved in 1985 that “workers should strive to eliminate [capitalism] completely by getting together and first of all fight for equality, and because the employer *expropriated* the people, the people should *do the same* to end this inequality and exploitation”.⁶⁵⁰ Others, notably Webster, were less enthusiastic about the prospect of a revolutionary rupture, arguing instead that “insurrectionism and those kinds of ideas for me are not possible” because “the real power to challenge the capitalist system, the apartheid system, was through the mobilisation of black workers” which was a “non-violent way because they had power in the heart of the economy”.⁶⁵¹

In either case, however, linking current struggles to anti-capitalism – whether from a social democratic or a quasi-syndicalist position – put workerism at odds with SACP communists, who argued for a two-stage revolution, with the anti-capitalist struggle relegated to stage two. For example, Saawu’s Vice President, Sam Njikelana, argued that “it is of vital importance that every effort be made to strengthen and develop the trade union movement and to reject any attempts to isolate workers from the National Democratic Struggle”.⁶⁵² Likewise, Godongwana in Fosatu was, by 1982, “believing that the struggle for a national democratic struggle was the “correct scientific position”,⁶⁵³ and therefore “critical of Joe Foster’s position, as if Fosatu was the beginning of the worker’s movement”.⁶⁵⁴

The aim of radical transformation that was both against apartheid and capitalism, also placed workerism at odds with ANC “Charterism”. Although many workerists display some respect

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁶⁴⁸ Teleconference interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁴⁹ Copelyn, J. 1991. “Collective Bargaining: a Base for Transforming Industry” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 6. p. 59

⁶⁵⁰ HP: AH 2065 D3.2. Fosatu Transvaal Co-ordinating Committee Meeting held on retrenchments in Hermiston on the 02/03/85, p. 6

⁶⁵¹ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁵² Njikelana, S. 1984. “The Unions and the Front: a response to David Lewis” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 7, p. 76

⁶⁵³ Enoch Godongwana cited in Forrest, “Power, Independence and Worker,” p. 534

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid*

for the Freedom Charter (and many, I think, largely in retrospect), it was certainly understood at the time by workerists to be insufficiently revolutionary – for it was “not going far enough”.⁶⁵⁵ It was also generally seen as a “populist”⁶⁵⁶ and “capitalist”⁶⁵⁷ document, as opposed to a socialist one, containing limited economic analysis, which meant it “didn’t address the issues that we were addressing then, which was building a working class movement that was strong enough to take on the state”.⁶⁵⁸ Nor did it say clearly “who will control the farms, presently owned by the capitalists, who will control the factories, the mines and so on”.⁶⁵⁹

In any case, as Erwin remarks, the “programme ... wasn’t necessarily supported by the ANC fully”.⁶⁶⁰ Consequently there were “just a lot of dreams in that document”.⁶⁶¹ This made the workerists critical and often vocally opposed of the “sort of blind loyalty to the Charter” displayed by Charterists, to it although many still believed that it could create the “scope”,⁶⁶² as a “worthwhile stepping stone in the absence of any alternative”.⁶⁶³ Obviously, the more “populist” faction in Fosatu, like Dlamini, as opposed to John Gomomo and Mayekiso, who favoured adoption of the Freedom Charter,⁶⁶⁴ cannot be considered workerist.

8.4.9. Structure versus Agency

Although workerists were committed to revolution, their politics stressed that this was a “process rather than an act”.⁶⁶⁵ This explains the common use by workerists of the word “transformation” (including of the state) as opposed to “revolution” – which was envisioned “across all institutions”.⁶⁶⁶ Workerism was thus not simply concerned with the capture of state power by a new set of (pro-worker) politicians, but a deep-seated *structural* change in the nature of power relations, in the industrial, political, cultural and indeed inter-personal spheres (as discussed previously).

⁶⁵⁵ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁵⁶ Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁵⁷ Alexander, “Towards a Workers Party”

⁶⁵⁸ Fanaroff, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵⁹ Alexander, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁶⁶¹ Sauls, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶² Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

⁶⁶³ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth. Mashishi remembered “people like Daniel Dube” as “the most vocal person in Fosatu to oppose it,” part of why Dube is located squarely in the workerist camp. (Interview with Petros Mashishi, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg)

⁶⁶⁴ Interview with Chris Dlamini, 9th June 2009, Johannesburg

⁶⁶⁵ Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology*, p. 47

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

However, workerists were explicitly antagonistic to any strategy prioritising conquest of state power, where the problem of democratisation was not adequately addressed. The position taken by workerist Copelyn, for example, in the “two hats debate”⁶⁶⁷ published in several issues of the *South African Labour Bulletin* in 1990,⁶⁶⁸ is just one important example. In this debate, Copelyn criticised socialists’ historical “fixation” on the state, which “resulted in the Eastern European model of socialism”.⁶⁶⁹ This, for Copelyn, was a “mistake” from which workers in Russia had taken “*seventy-three* years to recover”, having been subsumed entirely “under the control of the revolutionary party”, having had “no *independent* unions”.⁶⁷⁰ For Copelyn, a better solution could be found in “a perspective that gives a substantially greater role to the independent organs of civil society”, which could ensure a more democratic transition, given that these organisations are structured around the constant involvement of their membership, and would serve to “exercise a check on the institutions of the state, and the exercise of state power”.⁶⁷¹ Sauls likewise remembers a meeting between certain workerist leaders and the Director General of the Department of Labour, where Sauls facetiously sat on the chair of the Director General and said “one of these days I’m going to sit in this chair”.⁶⁷² According to Sauls, the other workerists “went for me; they criticised my understanding” and the fact that they thought he “wanted to be part of the... government structure”.⁶⁷³

Yet at the same time, the workerist strategy contains within it a contradictory urge (existing alongside this commitment to *structural* change) in which the solution is found in elevating

⁶⁶⁷ The “two hats” debate revolved around whether union officials should simultaneously hold office in a government or political parties. According to Pillay, three positions emerged in the debate: firstly that the wearing of two hats should be allowed, in order to advance working class interests in those structures; secondly that this should be permitted during a certain transition period, but that in the longer term these seats should be vacated, or alternatively, that unions and unionists should retain their independence.. (See Pillay, D. 1991. “The Workers Charter Campaign” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 5, p. 41. For an overview of the debate see Plaut, “Debates in a Shark Tank”).

⁶⁶⁸ Although this period is beyond the scope of this project, it is instructive for understanding workerism because it has resonance with the arguments made by various workerists in interviews.

⁶⁶⁹ Copelyn, “Collective Bargaining”, p. 28. Copelyn also bemoaned the structured alliance with the ANC in the article. Phillip Bonner likewise identified the formation of a structured alliance as fundamentally compromising the success of the workers struggle. Bonner therefore also understood Cosatu’s eventual capitulation to an alliance with the ANC as a “big loss”, from where there is “no way back” (Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg).

⁶⁷⁰ Copelyn, “Collective Bargaining”, p. 28.

⁶⁷¹ Copelyn, *op. cit*, p. 33

⁶⁷² Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁷³ *ibid*

individual worker-leaders into positions of state power. Alongside a scepticism towards the state, arising from the New Left and libertarian currents and influences within it,⁶⁷⁴ the more social democratic strand in workerism did have a tendency to see the solution to the workers struggle in the agency of individual leaders with “working class social backgrounds”.⁶⁷⁵ Dube for example maintained that “labour organisations produced some of the prominent political elite”, which “tells you that the labour organisations are one of the many training grounds for future political leaders” who would “have a better understanding of labour issues” because of their participation in the “nitty-gritty of the worker life”. For Dube, this should be seen as a “working model”.⁶⁷⁶

Similarly, in its criticism of the UDF, Fosatu emphasised that the UDF contained “very few working class leaders”, to which it posed a possible solution where “if the unions joined the UDF could they strengthen the hands of people like Lekota in establishing working class control”.⁶⁷⁷ *Fosatu Worker News* ran an article on the Brazilian Workers Party, praising Lula for his working-class background,⁶⁷⁸ as well as one on Tomas Borge, a “founding member of the ruling Sandanista National Liberation Front” and who now “serves as minister of the interior” and a “senior... revolutionary leader”.⁶⁷⁹ Although the Italian Factory Council movement was influential, its failure was seen to reside in “the fact that the Italian Communist Party was dominated by leaders who came *from outside the working class* and were therefore unable to give the factory council movement the political direction it needed”.⁶⁸⁰

Therefore, while workerism was undeniably committed to profound structural change, it simultaneously contained a paradoxical urge in which the solution to the workers struggle was seen to be found in the “goodwill” and experience of leaders drawn from the working class.

⁶⁷⁴ See for example, part of Jeremy Cronin’s critique of Copelyn’s article on the “two hats” debate is that “Copelyn seems not to believe that... their [the workers] state could work in conjunction with their independent mass democratic formations... his conception of workers’ (and their trade unions’) relation-ship to the state is one of perpetual opposition”. (Cronin, J. 1991. “Preparing Ourselves for Permanent Opposition?” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 7, p. 53)

⁶⁷⁵ Webster, *Cast in a Racial*, p. 250

⁶⁷⁶ Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2010, Port Elizabeth

⁶⁷⁷ HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3 Labour Studies Courses. “Trade Unions and Popular Movements”, p. 20

⁶⁷⁸ Fig. D. 1985. “Brazil: A Workers’ Party” in *Fosatu Worker News*, August 1985, No. 40, p. 7

⁶⁷⁹ HP: AH 1999 C1.7.3.16. Fosatu Education Briefing. 1983. “Nicaragua and Central America – what’s happening?”, p. 2

⁶⁸⁰ *South African Labour Bulletin*. 1983. “Lectures for Workers”, p. 33, my emphasis

8.5. Conclusion

While the short-term programme project of the workerists was fairly sound, their longer-term strategising was abortive, despite some embryonic attempts. Workerism lacked a coherent long-term political programme and strategy rooted in a coherent set of theoretical principles. This strategic failure should be located partly in the specific set of circumstances workerism found itself in at the time. In particular, this related to the extreme repressiveness of the South African polity, a circumstance that clearly deterred workerists from *full* participation in the discussion and elaboration of what was already a dangerously political project – the destruction of capitalism and the national liberation of South Africa's black majority.

However the roots of the problem lay deeper: in the action-oriented, pragmatic practice of the New Left – of which workerism was fundamentally an expression. This led to a blind faith on the part of the workerists in the spontaneity of the working class to “find the tools when the moment arrived”, and their eclectic appropriation of a range of theoretical traditions, allowing them to downplay the importance of a well-formulated and internally coherent political programme. This strategic failure was expressed in fundamental tensions in the long-term political programme of workerism that were never completely resolved. In particular it meant that the long-term project of workerism contained persisting ambivalences, evident in the co-existence of two key (often opposing and contradictory) strands, one quasi-syndicalist in character and the other more akin to social democracy.

This led workerists to concurrently urge abstentionism from the institutions of state and capitalism and oppositional direct action on the one hand, and participation and engagement with the state, courts and statutory institutions (with a view to their democratisation) on the other. The long-term strategy of workerism was thus wracked by inconsistencies and tensions, which ultimately served to undermine the objectives of workerism in the long-term, which paved the way for the resurgence of nationalism in the anti-apartheid struggle.

Chapter 9

9. Conclusion: The Definition and Decline of Workerism



Figure 9. Fosatu Executive at Wilgespruit. Back from right: John Gomomo, Fred Sauls, Alec Erwin, Chris Dlamini, Joe Foster (centre back). Fosatu Archives, AH 2680/D38

9.1. Defining Workerism

This report has sought to provide an answer to a question that has been posed before in the literature, but generally not answered: “What [if any] were the politics that gave [the workerists] a distinctive identity?”⁶⁸¹ Some have concluded that “this group was not a group at all”,⁶⁸² while others have made a wide range of sweeping yet contradictory claims about the workerists – many of which are most unsatisfactory. Ulrich and others are correct that the workerists “did not articulate a coherent position” – at least in the sense of a standardised, common and binding political programme – and this naturally creates a difficulty in attempting to “define their ideology as a group”⁶⁸³.

⁶⁸¹ Nash, “The Moment of Western Marxism”, p. 66.

⁶⁸² Desai, A. and H. Bohmke. 1997. “The Death of the Intellectual, the Birth of the Salesman: The South African Intellectual During the Democratic Transition” in *Debate*, No. 3, p. 12.

⁶⁸³ Ulrich, “The Origins”, p. 5

However, as I have shown, the workerists did nonetheless share sufficient common features, and thus workerism can meaningfully be identified as a definite current in the South African labour movement. Workerism was a multiracial tendency (which debunks claims that it was represented by a handful of white academics) and deeply political (concerned fundamentally with the destruction of capitalism and the national liberation of black workers specifically). While socialist, its leftism broke with the dominant socialism in South Africa typified by the SACP and Sactu. Although several accounts have reduced the politics of workerists to a form of Marxism, workerism must in fact be located in as part of an eclectic New Left that absorbed, besides insights from several strands of Marxism, a number of libertarian, anarchist and syndicalist influences, both directly and indirectly, as well as a brand of social democracy.

The failure to adequately explore and unpack the New Left link, and the reductive tendency to force workerism into a neat Marxist category, has generated a literature that provides only rough sketches of the ideas and praxis to which the workerist current subscribed because it fails to consider the full picture. It is only by situating workerism in the context of the emergence of the New Left that it becomes possible to grasp what is distinctive about it, the range of influences it included and therefore, the variety and richness of its ideas. The difficulty experienced in defining the ideology of workerism derives precisely from a an element of its ideology, a New Left-inspired *aversion* to formal “ideology”, or rigid “dogma”, both understood as predetermined formulas for action, and a corresponding action-oriented and pragmatic praxis, in which action was understood to precede theory, itself viewed as “loose and fuzzy”⁶⁸⁴.

Understood this way, it becomes possible to fully appreciate the eclectic and heterodox character of workerist thought, and simultaneously, to see workerism as coherent and distinct. This approach also partly explains why many workerists could simultaneously identify as Marxists *and* challenge some of its central premises (those of both orthodox and dissident strands). This approach has been termed “the art of the possible”. It also partly explains “the politics of engagement” evident in workerism, in which strong elements of social democracy were also present.

⁶⁸⁴ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

These mixtures must be seen to derive partly from a New Left-inspired free-floating pragmatism: thus the workerists, for example, simply ignored standard Marxist claims about the supposedly inherent limitations of trade unions, and viewed unions as agents of radical, decisive and transformative change. Yet the workerist faith in the unions was more than simply a rejection of elements of classical Marxism, or the product of an eclectic pragmatism. It must also be understood to derive from the direct as well as indirect influence exerted on workerism by other currents running through the New Left. The most important of these were anarchism and syndicalism, although some account can also be taken of council communism. Although workerists were rarely aware of the extent to which their ideas dovetailed with these traditions, the overlap was sufficiently significant that workerism can be described as having a strong quasi-syndicalist strand.

None of this is to say that workerists did not inwardly and outwardly identify as “Marxists”; in most cases they did. Conversely, many workerists downplayed their connection to the New Left. However, I have not used self-identification as the criteria for definition. Examining the ideas of workerism directly – as opposed to the caricatures generated in polemics – and the larger workerist praxis, it has been possible to identify workerism’s core features and intellectual influences.

Although incontrovertibly a product of the international New Left, however, workerism was not a mere reproduction of its emergence elsewhere, being fundamentally shaped by the particular context in which it appeared – a key aspect of which was the heavily censored South African political landscape. New Left ideas arrived in a context in which pre-established traditions and practices were in existence. In some cases, these were congruent with notions and practices popular in the New Left. For example, a stress on union democracy was deeply embedded in African union traditions,⁶⁸⁵ and the Eastern Cape Motor unions had developed a sense of “pragmatism and power” that gelled well with certain traditions in the New Left. At the same time, workerism operated in a very distinct context, where the national question was a central feature of social contradictions, which also forced workerism to develop political alternatives to African nationalism, to try and find a road to national liberation that was not *nationalist*. These sorts of constrained, mediated and transformed New Left ideas resulted in a distinct workerist tradition that was, contrary to

⁶⁸⁵ See Ulrich, “Only the Workers”; Buhlungu, “Democracy and Modernisation”

Nash's claim (that workerists viewed "political analysis as the product of an independent or external point of view"⁶⁸⁶), both indigenous and creative.

9.2. The Decline of Workerism

Given the important contribution of workerism to South African labour and liberation struggles, its self-defining opposition to African nationalism and "Stalinism", and its long-held opposition to capitalism and bourgeois ideology, it is interesting that in a mere couple of decades, so many former workerists have capitulated to neoliberal ideology. It is also interesting that after years of ideological and practical self-defining distance many workerists have themselves joined the ANC and SACP. As Horn recalls,

When the ANC was unbanned, it was interesting to see which way everybody went. It didn't follow a thing where all the workerists stayed out of the ANC and all the populists went into the ANC. What happened was that all the workerists did go into the ANC and all the populists stayed out because there were issues between the ANC and UDF.⁶⁸⁷

By the 1990s, many workerists reinvented themselves, moving from being radical opponents of the ANC to loyal ANC members. Most of those who remained in the unions accepted ANC hegemony and sought to influence ANC industrial policy in a more worker-friendly direction.⁶⁸⁸ This is the politics of "radical reform" – in which "strategic unionism" attempts to win the ANC to a pro-worker, progressive-competitive route to globalisation, as part of a social democratic strategy⁶⁸⁹ – and current Cosatu policy. Others, not least Erwin and Mayekiso, became closely aligned to Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Nelson Mandela as state President, and who championed the overtly neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution economic strategy.⁶⁹⁰ Erwin would also serve on the executive of the SACP. The extent of this about-turn is evident in Nash's observation that "after 30 years of growth and development" workerism "had effectively disappeared".⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁶ Nash, "The Moment of Western Marxism", p. 69

⁶⁸⁷ Telephone interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁶⁸⁸ Ndlozi, M. 2010, "Trade Unionism in South Africa", p. 78

⁶⁸⁹ See Adler and Webster, "Challenging Transition Theory" and Ndlozi, *op. cit.*, for more information

⁶⁹⁰ Republic of South Africa. 1996. Growth, Employment and Redistribution: a macro-economic strategy. Government Printers.

⁶⁹¹ See Nash, "The moment of" for a summary of the interpretations outlined here.

Space does not allow for a full analysis of this phenomenon, but, by way of conclusion, this report will make a partial contribution to this discussion: why did a powerful, influential and distinctive current evaporate?

Various interpretations have been given attempting to explain this rapid disappearance (these are summarised by Nash⁶⁹²). One interpretation suggests that the workerists did not capitulate at all. According to Webster, for example, it was perfectly natural that the workerists embrace the ANC: “its insights had been vindicated by the negotiated settlement of the 1990s” – these “insights” being the politics of engagement.⁶⁹³ The journey from working inside ICs to trying to shape ANC policy was merely a quantitative question involving difference in available *opportunities*, but perfectly consistent in strategic terms. This led Webster to argue that Fosatu *always* combined a “radical vision” with a “strategic approach to power”,⁶⁹⁴ placed “emphasis on gradualism, flexibility and compromise”,⁶⁹⁵ and negated the notion of “revolutionary rupture”.⁶⁹⁶

The problem with this approach is that it greatly simplifies the politics of workerism. Certainly Fosatu tended to a “politics of engagement”, as has been discussed, and it also included a social democratic strand. However, these elements existed *within* a larger *workerist* milieu that stressed class struggle, workers control and independent worker politics, anti-nationalism and a commitment to radical social change.

Therefore, workerism cannot be *reduced* to a politics of engagement, although Webster is perfectly correct that anticipations of “radical reform” can indeed be found in some elements of workerism. Fosatu’s “politics of engagement” with the state, of courts, and statutory industrial relations systems laid a basis for the current Cosatu approach. In light of this I agree with Adler, Maller and Webster that the pragmatism, legalism and negotiating approach of Fosatu is, in part, a foundation for SA’s negotiated transition and its corporatism,⁶⁹⁷ but I also stress that a fully-fledged strategy of radical reform is something *new* and represents a real *break* with workerism.

⁶⁹² Nash, “The moment of”

⁶⁹³ Nash, “the Moment of”, p. 77.

⁶⁹⁴ Webster, E. 1993. “Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction: Richard Turner and Radical Reform” in *Theoria*, Vol. 81, No. 2, October edn. p. 1

⁶⁹⁵ Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 7

⁶⁹⁶ Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 5

⁶⁹⁷ Adler, Maller, Webster, “Unions, Direct Action and”

The depth of immersion by Cosatu is far greater than anything Fosatu ever undertook. There is more than a difference of degree between *tactically* using an IC or a court battle under a harshly authoritarian regime to *win space* to build an *autonomous* radical labour movement on the one hand, and a *strategy* of embracing corporatism as well as a *formal*, political alliance with the *ruling* party of a capitalist *state* on the other (an alliance in which Cosatu is very much the junior partner.) The second position is, in fact, nothing but an embrace of *populism*, not continuity with *workerism*.

A variant of Webster's argument is provided by some of his fiercest critics, identified with figures like Ashwin Desai and Heinrich Bohmke. In their view, Webster's interpretation is basically correct, but not to be celebrated: it simply proves the treachery of the workerists from the start. Thus, they write, the workerists merely had a "fling" with radicalism, but their politics was "deceit and betrayal from the beginning".⁶⁹⁸ Their explanation is simple: white intellectuals have different class interests to black workers, and so, naturally, they betray them.

The basic problem with this claim is that it is a caricature of workerism. Workerism was primarily a black working class current,⁶⁹⁹ and so, its decline can hardly be attributed to petty bourgeois "treachery". Even if the argument that it was mere "deceit" were accepted, it would still be the case that tens of thousands of workers educated in workerism through Fosatu education, media, rallies and meetings embraced it as a radical praxis, *no matter* what sinister intentions the intellectuals had. Secondly, there is no basis whatsoever to suggest that workerism was simply a fraud "from the beginning": it was a mass current, with radical ideas, and a real threat to ANC hegemony for many years. Further, it would be incorrect to doubt the sincerity and sacrifices of the workerist intellectuals. Finally, as Nash points out, the Bohmke-Desai explanation does not really engage explain the intellectual content and trajectory of workerism; it simply avoids this key set of issues.⁷⁰⁰

Other authors have also alluded to the fact that workerism was unable to sustain itself in the face of a resurgence of nationalist struggle, which was partly related to the "tempo" of mass

⁶⁹⁸ Desai and Bohmke cited in Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁶⁹⁹ Like several other authors, Nash, Bohmke and Desai treat workerism as if it were primarily a white phenomenon.

⁷⁰⁰ Nash, "The Moment of Western Marxism"

struggle in the second half of the 1980s. My own research has vindicated this. It is true that workerists were completely caught off guard, and many testified to thinking that transition in South Africa “won’t change for thirty years”.⁷⁰¹ However, the workerists had survived earlier upheavals, including the Wiehahn reforms, the 1983-1985 urban rebellions, and the mass strikes of the era. The struggles of the second half of the 1980s, if perhaps larger than those of the late 1970s and early 1980s, were far less insurrectionary, and state repression eased off.

The question must thus still be asked: why did the workerists *not successfully take advantage* of the new situation, as they had of earlier changes? Given the strong position of the workerists in the new Cosatu, this question becomes even more pressing.

Some have suggested that the workerists were undermined by ANC and SACP infiltration in the unions, and the use of thuggish and undemocratic methods to impose an ANC agenda: the Naidoo visit to Harare (where he visited the ANC leadership without mandate) is a case in point. There is some evidence that some supposed workerists were, in fact, under SACP control. Erwin lamented that, by the mid-1980s, the SACP was actively “building its base” inside the federation, and Fosatu had “no real response to that”. Others have since suspected Erwin of having undisclosed links to the ANC/SACP. However, this begs the question *why* the powerful workerists were caught off guard by the small ANC and SACP, and unable to resist the ANC and SACP influence? Why did Fosatu have “real no response”? If, contrary to Webster’s claims, the workerists were crushingly defeated, and if contrary to Bohmke and Desai, this was by no means fore-ordained, and if the changing “tempo” struggle provided as many opportunities as it posed challenges, *why was workerism defeated?* More precisely, what were the weaknesses of workerism that allowed for this outcome?

9.2.1. The Problem with a Politics of Pragmatism

While a tendency to de-emphasize theory and emphasize pragmatism was the source of much of the power of Fosatu, and arguably responsible for much of its explosive growth, it also had important implications for the longevity of the workerist project.

⁷⁰¹ Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

First, it meant that workerist concepts and analyses were often underdeveloped, as well as applied inconsistently in practice. This was made evident in the willingness displayed by workerists to engage in, say, official state ICs with a view to transforming them, yet abstaining from the largely working class UDF on the grounds that it was so “populist” that it could not be transformed.

Second, there existed within workerism a dislocation between theory and practice, and an inconsistent application of theoretical insights. For example, the fact that workerists eschewed UDF affiliation because of its domination by the “petit bourgeoisie” when these “petit bourgeois” elements were in fact *not* even “petit bourgeois” according to Fosatu’s own definitions of class.

Third, and more importantly, the de-emphasis on theory and the emphasis on pragmatism predisposed workerists to shy away from dealing systematically with longer-term strategic questions, so that no long-term political programme was ever conceived to achieve the primary workerist goals (i.e. the abolition of capitalism and national liberation for the oppressed black majority). This resulted in the presence of inconsistencies and contradictions in what longer-term strategic thinking did exist, expressed in ambivalent actions exemplified by the co-existence of quasi-syndicalist and social democratic approaches. Thus, workerism was often *simultaneously* libertarian and statist, revolutionary and reformist, spontaneous and premeditated, “boycottist” and “engagist”.

It has been suggested that the failure to formulate an adequate theory of society as a basis on which to operate, and a corresponding programme for action, has been a fundamental weakness of workerism – something admitted by several workerists themselves.⁷⁰² As an example, their failure to develop a programme that enabled a leading, rather than sporadic, role in township struggles cost the workerists dearly, and left that space to the nationalists:

there are limitations in the theory and I think there’s the simple experiential point that the unions were forced to grapple with the issues coming up in the sphere of reproduction: the township, the struggles around rent, and that of course became very dramatic in 1984 with the stayaways ... The reason why the populist position came out was because of the failure, I

⁷⁰² Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg; Interview with Eddie Webster 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

think, of the Fosatu leadership to deal with those issues. So there was a theoretical and strategic limitation that led to the resurgence of populist thinking.⁷⁰³

As noted, the workerists aimed at national liberation without nationalism. This was remarkable, but not always well fleshed out. Webster suggested the inadequacies of dealing with the “unresolved” question of “white-black as coloniser-colonised”.⁷⁰⁴ Nash notes the workerist critique of African nationalism, and its related failure to present a clear alternative to the two-stage strategy as outlined by the SACP.⁷⁰⁵ Barrett underlines the fact that there was “not a great deal of discussion about, ok, well if we are worried about this two stage, what are you going to do about it?”, which she portrays as a “huge weakness of the movement historically”.⁷⁰⁶

The workerists did have an *idea* about how to tackle the national question but it was not formulated into a coherent strategy and programme for action. Their solution revolved around a national liberation struggle fought by a united, non-racial working class (as opposed to a multi-class nationalist or populist front) infused with socialist aspirations, which had as its central ambition the building up of organs of worker power – in the key industrial sectors – with a view to overcoming both apartheid and capitalism “with one movement”.⁷⁰⁷ This was precisely the thrust of an important paper by Erwin on this issue, yet even here, we find a clumsy and vague formulation of what this entails: “the form of the struggle may of itself raise the issue of transformation to a position of centrality...”.⁷⁰⁸ Unable to present a well-formulated alternative programme, many workerists were themselves later subsumed into the ANC:

... the FOSATU senior leadership... decided, no we are going to go with the ANC, precisely because we could see no effective means of transferring factory power into seizure of state power.⁷⁰⁹

At least part of the workerist inability to evolve an effective strategic alternative to the ANC/SACP stage theory arose from weaknesses of the New Left more generally. In his evaluation of the character, and rise and fall of the New Left in the USA and Britain, Nigel Young

⁷⁰³ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁰⁴ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁰⁵ Nash, “The Moment of Western Marxism”

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

⁷⁰⁷ Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2009, Cape Town

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid*

astutely notes the movement had “a mood militating against academic pomposity or theoretical prolixity; regarding detached analysis with scepticism, preferring participation and experiential recollection; trusting the spontaneous and expressive as against the calculated and measured ... linked to a pragmatic emphasis... and emphasis on ‘praxis’; on proof through action”.⁷¹⁰ Yet, he adds, this was also a serious *weakness*:

... one cannot avoid the judgement that the lack of a NL [New Left] theory of revolution would emerge naturally from the movement practice... The crude conceptualizations that later emerged, the piecemeal strategies, were an inevitable counterpart to the anti-intellectualism, pragmatism and moralism of the movement; as a result they left a vacuum that would be filled with concepts and strategies drawn from dead or external models”.⁷¹¹

In their “action first, doctrine later”⁷¹² approach to politics and political struggle, Fosatu’s workerists were simply unable to formulate a suitably coherent theory of society and a corresponding political programme sufficiently solid to sustain their vision of a non-racial democratic and socialist South Africa. In other words it failed to adequately deal with important theoretical and strategic problems facing the labour movement. Indeed, in its “respect for the autonomy of the workers’ movement”,⁷¹³ rooted in a New Left-inspired conviction in spontaneous activity of the working class, workerism left a strategic vacuum into which the SACP and ANC were more than willing to step. Moreover, in the context of the resurgence of mass struggle, without a clear conception of its objectives and the means necessary to achieve them, workerism was simply derailed as it became caught up in “a kind of sentiment that started to engulf the country”.⁷¹⁴ As Webster reflects:

Philosophers describe the world, the point is to change it. Eleven theses on Feuerbach. Look, I’m a product of May 68 New Left, and I think in different ways everyone else in that group was. Turner’s eye of the needle captures it better than anything else. And if you put everything on action, then thinking about alternatives which is... *ja*... no it’s a weak part. It’s a

⁷¹⁰ Young, N. 1977. *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left*. Routledge and Keegan and Paul: London, p. 39

⁷¹¹ Young, *An Infantile Disorder?* p. 255

⁷¹² Genovese, E. 1971: *In Red and Black: Marxian explorations in Southern and Afro-American history*. Pantheon Books: New York, p. 17

⁷¹³ Nash, “The Moment of Western Marxism”

⁷¹⁴ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

weak part that I criticise in my book [*Cast in a Racial Mould*]. The necessity of utopian thinking... that's how we resolved it – think utopically".⁷¹⁵

9.2.2. The Necessity of an Anarchist/Syndicalist Party

Related to this was the failure to develop an adequate strategy for the *organisation* of the workerists *as workerists*. Given that workerism closely resembled syndicalism in key respects (primarily in its emphasis on *industrial unions, not parties*, as the primary vehicle through which socialism can be achieved), a more rigorous understanding of the historical insights of that tradition (with decades of practical experience and theoretical reflection), may have served workerists well. A key debate within the syndicalist movement since the Russian Revolution has revolved around the question of political organisation – with a significant section of the movement making a strong case that revolutionary syndicalist unions require syndicalist parties.

These syndicalists argue that while democratic and autonomous mass unions (much like those of Fosatu) must form the base of any movement seeking revolutionary change, “there is an immense need for an organisation which... establishes a general and tactical political line which would serve as a guide for the whole movement”.⁷¹⁶ In so doing they advocate a political organisation - which rallies “militants to a base of precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organisational, i.e. the more or less perfect base of an homogenous programme”.⁷¹⁷ The purpose of such an organisation would be to consistently agitate within the broader movement to ensure the dominance of syndicalist ideas within it – as a means to win the battle of ideas.

Workerists clearly appreciated the importance of the battle of ideas in a similar way to these syndicalists, hence the extensive educational work they undertook within Fosatu. But, despite some nascent thinking by certain workerists in this direction, most failed to appreciate the importance of this sort of organisation for the longevity of the workerist thrust. This failure would have significant consequences for the long-term survival of workerism as a current.

⁷¹⁵ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷¹⁶ The Dielo Trouda Group. 1926. *The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists*, no page numbers. Unpublished paper, available at <struggle.ws/platform/plat_preface.html>

⁷¹⁷ *ibid*

Unity negotiations between the unions leading to the formation of Cosatu in 1985, were led by the workerists and most of the important early affiliates of Cosatu (drawn from Fosatu) – the key exception being the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which broke away from the Cusa/UTP groups to join the unity talks. Workerists remained key players in Cosatu at both affiliate and federation level. Erwin, for example, was head of Cosatu education to 1986-1988, and then head of Numsa education until 1993. However, by 1990, when the ANC and SACP were unbanned, and formally allied with Cosatu, workerism, if it existed at all, was no longer a significant force. Many had politically capitulated to the ANC and SACP, and would go onto play important roles in the ANC government.

Yet from the start the workerists were on the defensive: the new federation, in calling itself the *Congress* of South African Trade Unions, signalled an affinity with the ANC, and the exiled Sactu therefore praised the new body.⁷¹⁸ Almost immediately after the launch, Cosatu's General Secretary, Jay Naidoo, visited the ANC in Harare, Zimbabwe, without mandate and to the anger of a large sector of the federation. Mawu was particularly vocal in condemning the politics of the leadership.⁷¹⁹ A fierce workerist-“populist” battle rocked Cosatu for its first two years, often paralysing the federation, and even generating splinter unions.⁷²⁰ A notable clash took place at the July 1987 congress, centred on the pro-ANC NUM and the workerist Numsa, centred on the issue of whether the federation should adopt the ANC's Freedom Charter, or focus on an overt and direct struggle for socialism.⁷²¹

However, the NUM won the day, and the workerists were never again to play an independent, central role in shaping the politics of Cosatu. The “populists”, Ndlozi suggests, used the very democratic structures that the “independent worker bloc” was so proud to have established, in order to conquer the workerist unions to an alliance with the ANC.⁷²² Had the workerists had a clearer strategic vision, expressed by a coherent, political bloc that could match the rival ANC/“populist” faction, blow-for-blow, their impact on Cosatu would have been far greater. In lieu of such a bloc, however, workerism was outmanoeuvred; it gradually declined until it was entirely eclipsed and its legacy and influence excised from history.

⁷¹⁸ Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 73-75

⁷¹⁹ Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 74, 100

⁷²⁰ Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 101-104, 113-115, 202-211

⁷²¹ Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 212-223

⁷²² Ndlozi, M. 2010, “Trade Unionism in South Africa”, p. 152

9.2.3. Workerism and a Politics of “Engagement”

A further part of the explanation for the eclipse of workerism does lie in the “politics of engagement”. This engagist outlook, I would argue, laid the basis for several important decisions that played a part in the decline of the current. Nash suggests, for example, that it led workerism to a “willingness to submerge itself into the dominant ideology on the grounds that it was dominant”.⁷²³ As an example, when Numsa fought the NUM in 1987 over whether Cosatu should adopt the Freedom Charter in 1987, it eventually *adopted* the Freedom Charter “tactically” as a “minimum programme”.⁷²⁴ Several respondents in this study have made reference to a similar phenomenon by suggesting that for the purposes of remaining “relevant”,⁷²⁵ workerists felt that they “hadn’t really any alternative to a partnership with the nationalist movement”.⁷²⁶

As the transition from apartheid started to take place, likewise, several workerists entered policy think tanks like the Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG), which was closely linked to the ANC as well as Cosatu, the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) at UCT, and the Sociology of Work Project (SWOP) at Wits.⁷²⁷ Bonner’s explanation for the decision to enter into these forums is typical of sort of engagist outlook so common to workerism:

the moment you saw that word “macro-economic policy” emerge, which it did in the 1990s, with Cosatu taking the lead, and that group of economists meeting ... that’s when that pass had been sold. Maybe that wasn’t the right decision but that pass had been sold. So then the moment you’re thinking about macro-economic policy then you’re talking about the commanding heights. Well then, get up there, and be in the commanding heights.

As Desai and Bohmke note (rather contradicting their earlier claims about the inherent “deceit” of workerism”), participation in such forums meant workerists “suddenly turned their attentions towards making the system work”,⁷²⁸ leading to the “speedy abrogation of this group’s independent voice”, either “as the ex-left intelligentsia became the ideologues and

⁷²³ Numsa cited in Nash, “The Moment of Western Marxism”, p. 77.

⁷²⁴ Numsa. 1987. “Numsa Political Resolutions.” *SALB* Vol. 12, No. 5, July edn. p. 10; also see Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 219

⁷²⁵ Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

⁷²⁶ Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

⁷²⁷ Desai and Bohmke, “The Death of the Intellectual”, p. 15

⁷²⁸ Desai and Bohmke, *op. cit.*, p. 14

policy-wonks of the new government”,⁷²⁹ or actual office bearers in Mandela and Mbeki’s cabinets.

At the same time, this immersion in official policy – something Fosatu had previously avoided – signalled that in Cosatu, “abstentionism, especially of the militant variety, had been made impossible”.⁷³⁰ As “radical reform” became union policy, the unions shifted “towards more cooperative relations with employers and engagement in tripartite fora”.⁷³¹ (It must be stressed, however, that there is a break; Fosatu never attempted the sort of policy reforms Cosatu does now, such as trying to make the chemical sector more competitive, or proposing restructuring plans for state railways; it was far more oppositional to the state, employers and policy.⁷³²)

It is worth noting, at this stage, that “radical reform” has failed to deliver: there have been arguably very few substantial gains for workers as a result of these crucial decisions, which broke with the old workerism. Studies have shown that “radical reform” has seen “participation” in union democracy by workers replaced by technocratic policy “engagement” and “doing it from the top”.⁷³³ Ndlozi, for example, in a case study of the CWIU, found that:

the Websterian [i.e. pro-“radical reform”] literature has tended to overstate the advantages of radical reform... rather than create building blocks for socialism, this strategy did not secure any advances on labour’s core demands; instead it has led to dire consequences for workers, in the context of a relentless neo-liberal onslaught that has lasted from the 1980s late apartheid period and straight through into the new parliamentary democracy.⁷³⁴

Likewise, the argument made by workerists in favour of unionists entering the state in order to engage and ensure a pro-worker agenda seems to have been sorely disputed by actual events: the fact that “important labour activists and intellectuals have been inserted into key

⁷²⁹ Desai and Bohmke, *op. cit.*, p. 31

⁷³⁰ Desai and Bohmke, “The Death of the Intellectual”, p. 20

⁷³¹ Webster, E. 1997. “The Intellectual’s Dilemma: To Serve or to Criticize”, University of the Witwatersrand Sociology Department Occasional Paper #10 (cited in Desai and Bohmke, *op. cit.*, p. 20)

⁷³² Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”

⁷³³ Interview with Phillip Bonner, 18th November 2010

⁷³⁴ Ndlozi, “Trade Unionism in South Africa”, p. 130. See also Panitch, L. 1996. “Cosatu and Corporatism: a Reply to Webster” in *South Africa Report Archive*, Vol. 11, No. 3, April, available at <<http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=3885>>

state structures”,⁷³⁵ has in fact made very little difference in yielding a “society that meets people’s basic needs while developing practises of participatory democracy”.⁷³⁶ Neither has it proved successful in stemming the tide of the neoliberalism; in fact, certain workerists have themselves become central protagonists of the doctrine, among them figures like Erwin, who, as ANC Minister of Trade Industry (1996-2004), and then as Minister of Public Enterprises (2004-2008), playing an important role in neoliberal reforms.

In the opening chapter of this report, the crucial contribution by workerists to the anti-apartheid struggle was underscored. In fact, despite common interpretations, workerism was at times far more influential and significant than the ANC, both in its novelty and in its weight. Over the course of this report, I have shown the depth, breadth and richness of its ideas, as well its considerable organisational and political breakthroughs and achievements – which have left a significant mark on both South African labour and left history (even if unrecognised), and on the current labour movement. Yet these facts leave an uncomfortable picture: despite the immense power once commanded by workerism – in terms of its ideas and its organisational muscle – the tendency has almost entirely been eclipsed. In previous sections I have suggested that its decline should not be interpreted to result simply from external factors. Repressive conditions were not instrumental in this process, nor was the purported “natural” tendency for unions to become more moderate over time, nor even (as some might suppose) a sort of self-evident teleology in which the ANC always wins. ANC hegemony before 1994 was fragile, and the ANC’s role in the liberation struggle was dwarfed for most of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s by other currents, including workerism. Thus it is fundamentally erroneous to assume universal ANC dominance as many are prone to doing.

Instead, this report has suggested internal factors for the decline of the phenomenon. These lie fundamentally, but not exclusively, in the particularities of the international movement of which they were so much a part. In particular, this related to a theoretical and strategic “politics pragmatism” which left workerism devoid of a long-term political programme grounded in a coherent analytical framework, and a means for achieving its ambitious ends. These failures left a vacuum, which came to be filled by the far less radical and transformative politics of the SACP/ANC, and the subsumption of the workerist thrust into it.

⁷³⁵ Adler and Webster, “Challenging Transition Theory”, p. 77

⁷³⁶ Adler and Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 77

This report thus demonstrates the importance and relevance of a proper understanding of workerism, not just for history's sake, but for the sake of present and the future – in a time marked, on the one hand, by the revival of international mass political struggle on a scale not seen since the New Left's demise (of which the "Occupy" movement is key), and on the other, the proliferation of popular movements rooted in same sort fuzzy politics and "action-first" outlook typified by workerism an the New Left.

Reference List

Primary Sources

Published:

Alexander, P. 1985. "Towards a Workers' Party: Interview with Moses Mayekiso" in *Socialist Worker Review*, No. 80, October edn.

Baskin, J. 1982. "Growth of a New Worker Organ – The Germiston Shop Stewards Council" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 8

Bohm, W.D. and W.D. Haywood. 1911. *Industrial Socialism*. Charles H. Kerr: Chicago

Bonner, P. 1974. "The Decline and Fall of the ICU: A case of self-destruction?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 6

Bonner, P. 1979 "Focus on Fosatu" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No.1, May edn.

Cape Town Correspondent. 1983. "Unions and the UDF" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 8, and Vol. 9, No. 1

Comrades in Africa. 1985. "The Intelligentsia Must Be Won Over to Our Side" in *African Communist*, No. 101, second quarter

Copelyn, J. 1982. "Problems in Collective Bargaining", paper presented at a seminar organised by the Natal Chamber of Industries, reprinted in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 1

Copelyn, J. 1991. "Preparing Ourselves for Permanent Independence" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 8

Copelyn, J. 1991. "Collective Bargaining: A base for transforming industry" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 6

Cosatu Workers' Diary 1986

Cronin, J. 1986. "The question of unity - a reply" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 3

Dome (Organ of the University of Natal Student Representative Council). 1969. March 27 edn..

Erwin, A. 1984. "The Fosatu Education Workshop" in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 9, No. 8

Erwin, A. 1985. "The Question of Unity in Struggle" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 1

Fig. D. 1985. "Brazil: A Workers' Party" in *Fosatu Worker News*, August 1985, No. 40

- Fine, B., De Klerk, F. and D. Innes. 1981. "Trade Unions and the State: The question of legality" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 2
- Fine, B. 1982. "Trade Unions and the State once more: a reply to our critics" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, no.1
- Fosatu. 1982. "Annual Report" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 4 & 5
- Fosatu. 1982. "The Parallel Union Thrust: Memorandum issued by Fosatu on 8 November 1979" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6 & 7
- Fosatu. 1983. "Fosatu on Unity" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No 5
- Fosatu. 1980. "Tuacc Central Committee Statement on the Amended Industrial Conciliation Act that Forms the Basis on the Joint Stand with other Unions" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6 & 7
- Fosatu Worker News*, "What does Tuacc Stand For?", October 1979
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Trade Unions and the Law", November 1979, No. 2
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Fosatu: the first year", April 1980, No. 4
- Fosatu Worker News*. "The Zisizeni Basebenzi Project", October 1979
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Fosatu Central Committee statement on the Amended Industrial Conciliation Act", November 1979
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Registration – the big test", February 1980
- Fosatu Worker News*. "An Introduction to the Tuacc", June 1980
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Victimization – Employer Found Guilty", December 1981, 9th edn.
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Interview with John Gomomo", February/March 1985, No. 65/36
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Editorial", March 1982
- Fosatu Worker News*. "May Day", February/March 1985, No. 65/36
- Fosatu Worker News*. "The Hungry Search for Profit", Feb/Mar 1985 No. 65/36
- Fosatu Worker News*. "Only Workers can Directly Challenge the Capitalists", August 1985, No. 40
- Fosatu Worker News*. "2400 Textile Members Lose Jobs over Past Year", October 1985, No. 42
- Fosatu Worker News*. "What is Education?" October 1985, No. 42

Fosatu Worker News. “The Making of the Working Class, part 15: Sactu and the Congress Alliance”, October 1985, No. 42

Fosatu Worker News. “The Making of the Working Class, Part 11: “The ICU collapses”, October 1985, No. 42

Fosatu Worker News. “Miners’ Court Victory”, November 1985. No 43

Fosatu Worker News. “What is Education? Part 2” November 1985. No. 43

Golding, M. 1986. “BC Trade Unions” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 2

Gramsci, A. 1968. “Soviets in Italy” reprinted in *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 5

General Workers Union. 1981. “Reply to Fine, de Klerk and Innes” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3

Gerth, H. (ed.). 1958. *The First International: Minutes of the Hague Conference of 1872*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison

Haysom, F. 1981. “In Search of Concessions: reply to Fine et al” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3

Hindson, D. 1983. “Union Unity” in *South African Labour Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 6

Hirsch, A. and M. Nicol. 1981. “Trade Unions and the State – a response” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3

Isisebenzi. “What does Fosatu Stand For?”, July 1997

Isizwe. 1986. “Errors of Workerism” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 3

Isizwe. 1986. “The Errors of Workerism”, Vol. 1, No. 3, November edn., available at <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/1986/workerism.htm>

Khanyile. 1982. “What is a Trade Union” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No 1

Komanisi, B. 2006. “State Power” in the *Information Bulletin of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party*, Vol. 5, No. 1, available at <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/2006/komaniko.htm>

Lambert, R. 1983. “Sactu and the IC Act” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 6

Morobe, M. 1987. “Towards a People's Democracy: The UDF View” in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 40

Naledi Writers Unit. 1985. “Working Class Culture and Popular Struggle” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 5

National Forum. 1991. "Manifesto of the Azanian People", in Lodge, T. and B. Nasson. *All Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. David Phillip: Johannesburg

Nhere "The Dangers of 'Legal Marxism' in South Africa" in *African Communist*, No. 99

Njikelana, S. 1984. "The Unions and the Front: a response to David Lewis" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 7

Numsa. 1987. "Numsa Political Resolutions." *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 5, July edn.

Nyawuza. 1985. "The New "Marxist" Tendencies and the Battle of Ideas in South Africa" in *African Communist*, No. 103, 4th Quarter

Rees, R. 1983. "Katlehong Removals" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No 6

Republic of South Africa. 1996. *Growth, Employment and Redistribution: a macro-economic strategy*. Government Printers

SACP. [1962] 1981. "The Road to South African Freedom" in Bunting, B. (ed.). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the history of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980*. Inkululeko Publishers: London

South African Labour Bulletin. 1976. "Comment: The state and the freedom of association", Vol. 2, No. 9 &10

South African Labour Bulletin. 1980. "Interview with Freddie Sauls: Secretary of Numarwosa", Vol. 2, No. 3, Sept edn.

South African Labour Bulletin. 1981. "Critique of the Act", Vol. 7, No. 1 & 2

South African Labour Bulletin. 1983. "Workshop on Women", Vol. 9, No. 3

South African Labour Bulletin. 1983. "Lectures for Workers", Vol. 8, No. 8 and Vol. 9, No. 1

South African Labour Bulletin. "Interview with Mama Lydia Ngwenya", Vol. 8, No 6

South African Labour Bulletin. 1983. "Women and Unions", Vol. 8, No. 6

South African Labour Bulletin. 1984. "Trade Union Education and Training Programmes", Vol. 9, No 8

South African Labour Bulletin. 1985. "Interview: Union Organisation in Volkswagen", Vol. 11, No. 1

Sisulu, Z. 1986. "People's Education for Peoples' Power: keynote address to the Conference of the National Education Crisis Committee" in *Transformation*, No. 1

Social Review, 1983. December edn.

Spartacist South Africa. Newspaper of the African Section of the International Communist League (Fourth International). Winter 2002-3

Storey, P. 1984. "Trade Unions and the UDF" in *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, November issue

Storey, P. 1985. "South Africa – How Close to Revolution?" in *Inqaba yaBasebenzi*, November issue

Sole, K. 1984 "Class and Populism" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 8

Solidarność. 1981. "Directions for Action" published in *Socialist Review*, No. 59. Vol. 11, No. 5

Swilling, M. 1987. "The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt". Paper presented to the Wits History Workshop, available at < http://abahlali.org/files/swilling.udf_.pdf>

Swilling, M. 1984. "Workers Divided: A critical assessment of the split in Mawu on the East Rand", in *South African Labour Bulletin*, No. 10

Tuacc (Tvl). 1981. "Registration" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 8

Toussaint. 1983. "A Trade Union is not a Political Party: critique of the Speech "Where Fosatu Stands" in *African Communist*, No. 93

Two Trade Unionists. 1987. "Errors of Workerism: A Response" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 3, March-April edn.

Von Holdt, K. 1987. "The Political Significance of Cosatu: A response to Plaut" in *Transformation* 5, available at < <http://www.transformation.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/Issue-5/THE-POLITICAL-SIGNIFICANCE-OF-Cosatu.html>>

Webster, E. 1983. "Mawu and the Industrial Council – a comment" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 5

Webster, E. 1990. "Self-Management in Yugoslavia: failed experiment in democratic socialism?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 1

Webster, E. and P. Bonner. 1979. "Background" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No 2

Wits Student. 1982. "Amnesty International demands Unbanning", Vol. 34, No. 18

Workers Unity. 1982. "'Direct Links' – Stinks!", April edn.

Work in Progress. 1984. "Mawu and Ummawsa: Fight for the factories", No 33

Work in Progress. 1987. "Sarmcol Strikers' Co-operative: worker controlled production", No. 46

Fosatu Documents:

Historical Papers (HP):

HP: AH 1999. C1.1.1. An Introduction to the Fosatu, June 1983

HP: AH 1999. C1.1.3. Fosatu Policy Proposals

HP: AH 1999. C1.6 Fosatu: its policies and objectives, August 1980

HP: AH 1999. C1.6. Recommendations from the Strategy Seminar held on the 17th and 18th March 1985

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.1. Minutes of the Second Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held on the 29th and 30th September 1979 at Koinonia, Durban

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.2 Minutes of the Central Committee Meeting, 26th and 27th July 1980

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.3. Draft Resolution of Policy Proposed by the Fosatu Executive

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.2.3 Minutes of the 4th Central Committee Meeting held on the 15th and 16th November 1980. Appendix 1 – Delegates

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.3. Agenda for 1981 Central Committee Meeting

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.3. Minutes of the 5th Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held 25th/26th April 1981

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.1.1.3. Minutes of the 6th Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held 31st October and 1st November at Wilgespruit Centre, JHB

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16. Fosatu Education Briefing. 1983. “Nicaragua and Central America – what’s happening?”

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.11. Interview with Andrew Zulu

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.11. Telegram from Fosatu Western Cape to Ian Bissel of *Fosatu Worker News*

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.1.11. Telegram from Phil Bonner. The Divided Working Class.

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.10. The Workers Struggle: Where does Fosatu Stand? Occasional Publication No. 5, 1982

HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11. “Editorial”

HP: AH 1999, C1.7.3.16.1.11. Fosatu Press Statement 08/16

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3. Women Workers. Fosatu Education Series Booklet

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3. Trade Unions and Popular Movements. Fosatu Education Series Booklet

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3. Industrial Relations under Capitalism. Fosatu Education Series Booklet

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.3.2. Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers' Union, Fosatu Education Series Booklet

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.16.11. "The Workers Story"

AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. Advanced Course May 1985

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3. Handwritten notes about the Fosatu Labour Studies Course 1984

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3. Fosatu Labour studies course 1982

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.6. Report by Education Co-ordinator on Political Course 1985

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.3. Adrienne Bird [education co-ordinator] report to NEDCOM [National Education Committee] on the Fosatu Labour Studies Course, 18/09/1984

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.1. March 1985 Advanced Course. Trade and Imperialism

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.5.1. Letter from Shireen Motala (Education Officer) to the General Secretary regarding the Fosatu training course

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.5.3. Organisers Course 1984

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.6. Basic outline of Political Follow up course 1985

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.18. Miscellaneous. Document titled "Timeline"

HP: AH 1999. C1.7.3.17.18. Lecture delivered to the inaugural Congress of Fosatu: The History of Labour Organisation in South Africa

HP: AH 1999. C1.8. Fosatu Constitution (as amended at the second national congress in April 1982)

HP: AH. 1999. C3.14. Statement by the Fosatu CC

HP: AH 1999. C.4. Background to the Meeting between Fosatu Executive and the UDF

HP: AH 1999. D3.1. Summary of Fosatu Central Committee Meeting held 15/16th October 1983

HP: AH 2065. D3.1. Report By the National Education Secretary to the Fosatu Central Committee meeting held 20th October 1984

HP: AH2065. D3.1. Recommendations on the 1985 Education Programme to the Central Committee Meeting Held 20th October 1984

HP: AH 2065. D4.1. Fosatu Transvaal Region: Policy on Registration, p. 2

HP: AH 2065. D10. International Labour Reports September/October in *Tuacc Bulletin*, 31 January 1985

Labour Research Service (LRS) Trade Union Library:

Trade Union Library (TULEC): Salha 8 c1: Fosatu. *Fosatu Press Digest* (hereafter FPR). “Don’t Vote in August – Fosatu”, 3 June 1984, No. 58

TULEC. Salha 8 c2: Fosatu. “FW” in *FPD*. “Employers Fight Back”, 6th May 1984

TULEC. Salha 8c2: Fosatu. Sunday Tribune in *FPD*. “Employers slam role of the Industrial Court at seminar”, 6th May 1984

TULEC. Salha 8 c2: Fosatu. Friedman, S. in *FPD*. “Court Under Pressure”, 11th February 1984

TULEC. Salha c2: Fosatu. Rand Daily Mail in *FPD* “Unions set to oppose labour party”, 2nd February 2003

TULEC. Salha. 8 c2: Fosatu. *Fosatu Bulletin*. “The recession and Retrenchments”, 5th November 1984

TULEC. Trade Union General Box. Labour History Workshop. “The Formative Years of the Independent Labour Movement: 1966 – 1979”. 18-19th February 2002.

TULEC. 8 a2: Fosatu. Mawu and the Industrial Council. Fosatu Education Series Booklet, p. 11

Interviews:

Interview with Taffy Adler, 16th March 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Jane Barrett, 26th February 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Phil Bonner, 18th October 2010, Johannesburg

Teleconference Interview with John Copelyn, 21st October 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Chris Dlamini, 9th June 2009, Johannesburg

Interview with Daniel Dube, 21st July 2009, Port Elizabeth

Interview with Alec Erwin, 23rd July 2010, Cape Town

Interview with Bernie Fanaroff, 27th November 2009, Johannesburg

Interview with Joe Foster, 4th February 2010, Cape Town

Telephone Interview with Pat Horn, 30th November 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Petros Mashishi, 12th June 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Petros Mashishi, 26th January 2010, Johannesburg

Interview with Moses Mayekiso, 25th January 2010, Johannesburg

Telephone interview with Enver Motala, 14th December 2010, Johannesburg.

Interview with Fred Sauls, 29th January 2010, Port Elizabeth

Interview with Eddie Webster, 20th November 2010, Johannesburg

Secondary Sources

Books, Journals and Theses

Adler, G. and E. Webster, 1995. "Challenging Transition Theory: The labour movement, radical reform, and transition to democracy in South Africa" in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1

Adler, G. 1994. "'The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in it': race, class and collective action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986". PhD Dissertation, Columbia University

Adler, G., Maller, J. and E. Webster. 1992. "Unions, Direct Action and Transition in South Africa" in Etherington, N. (ed.). *Peace, Politics and Violence in the New South Africa*. Zell: University of Michigan

Alexander, P. 2000. *Workers, War and the Origins of apartheid: Labour and Politics in South Africa, 1939-48*. Ohio University Press: Ohio

Ally, S. 2005. "Oppositional intellectualism as reflection, not rejection of power: Wits Sociology, 1975-1989" in *Transformation*, No. 59

Amsden, M. 1978. "Industrial Collectivisation under Workers' Control: Catalonia, 1937 – 1939" in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 3

Appelrough, S. and L.D. Edles. 1965. *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Sage: New Delhi

Bailey, K.C. 1994. *Methods of Social Research*. The Free Press: United States

Bakunin, M. [1867-72] 1950. *Marxism, Freedom and the State*. Freedom Press: London, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/mf-state/index.htm>>

Bakunin, M. [1869] 1971. "The Policy of the International" in Dolgoff, S. (ed.). *Bakunin on Anarchy: selected works by the activist-founder of world anarchism*. George Allen and Unwin: London

Barchiesi, F. 1996. "South Africa in Transition: Scenarios facing organised labour" in *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 3

Barchiesi, F. and B. Kenny. 2002. "From Workshop to Wasteland: deindustrialisation and fragmentation of the black working class on the East Rand (1990-1999)" in Altena, B. and M. van der Linden (eds.). *De-industrialization: social, cultural, and political aspects*. Cambridge University Press: Britain.

Baskin, J. 1991 *Striking Back: A history of Cosatu*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg

Beer, M. 2002. *A History of British Socialism*. Routledge: London

- Bendix, S. 1983. "A Brief Overview of the Various 'Streams' of the labour Movement". Unpublished Thesis. Cape Town
- Berg, B. 1998. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Allyn and Bacon: Boston
- Blee, M. and V. Taylor. 2002. "Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research" in Klandermans, B. and S. Staggenborg (eds.). *Methods of Social Movement Research*. University of Minnesota Press: United States
- Blazyca, G. 1983. *Planning is Good for You: the case for popular control*. Pluto Press: London
- Birchall, I. 1974. *Workers Against the Monolith: The communist parties since 1943*. Pluto Press: London
- Boggs, C. 1976. *Gramsci's Marxism*. Urizen Book: New York
- Bonner, P. 1974. "The Decline of the ICU: a case of self-destruction" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 6
- Bookchin, M. 1994. *To Remember Spain: the anarchist and syndicalist revolution of 1936: essays by Murray Bookchin*. AK Press: London
- Bouchard, T.J. 1976. "Unobtrusive Measures: An inventory of uses" in *Sociological Research and Methods*, No. 4268
- Bozzoli, B. and P. Delius. 1990. "Radical History and south African Society" in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7
- Bozzoli, B. (ed.). 1983. *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist penetration and popular response*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg
- Bozzoli, B. (ed.). 1979. *Labour, Townships and Protest*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg
- Bozzoli, B. (ed.). 1987. *Class, Community and Conflict: South African perspectives*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg
- Bretibart, M.N. 1978. "Anarchist Decentralisation in Rural Spain, 1936 – 1939" in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10. No. 3
- Breitbart, M.N. 1978. "Spanish Anarchism: an introductory essay" in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, Vol. 10. No. 3
- Brenner, R. 1977. "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism" in *New Left Review*, No. 104
- Brewer, A. 1980. *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A critical survey*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: New York

- Bricianer, S. 1978. *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils*. Telos Press: St. Louis
- Brinton, M. 1970. *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control 1917 to 1921*. Solidarity: London
- Bonner. 2011. Speech given at Historical Papers Archives Unit Book Launch: '*The Future Is In The Hands Of The Workers*': *A History of Fosatu*, 17 February 2011, available at <<http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/docs/fosatu/BonnerspeechFosatuBookLaunch.pdf>>
- Buhlungu, S. 2001. "Democracy and Modernisation in the Making of the South African Movement: The dilemma of leadership, 1973-2000". PhD Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand
- Buhlungu, S. 2010. *A Paradox of Victory: Cosatu and the democratic transformation in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu Natal Press: South Africa
- Buhlungu, S. 2006. "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The contradictory location of white officials in black unions in South Africa, 1973-94" in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 54, No. 3
- Buhlungu, S. 2005. "Trade Unions and the Making of the Mass Movement" in *Khanya*, No. 8
- Buhlungu, S. 2006. "Whose Cause and Whose History?" in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 54, No. 3
- Callinicos, A. 1992. *Between Apartheid and Capitalism*. Cox and Wyman Limited: England
- Callinicos, L. 1986. "The People's Past: Towards transforming the present" in *Critical Arts*, Vol. 4. No 2
- Carr, B. 1975. "Afterword" in Carr, J. *Bad: The Autobiography of James Carr*. Herman Grof: New York
- Carr, E.H. 1966. *A History of Socialist Russia: The Bolshevik revolution, 1917-1923*. Penguin: Hammondsworth
- Caute, D. 1988. *The Year of the Barricades: A journey through 1968*. Harper and Row: New York
- Coates, K. and T. Topham. 1972. *The New Unionism*. Peter Owen: London
- Coates, K. 2003. *Workers' Control: Another World is Possible: arguments from the Institute for Workers' Control*. Spokesman Books: UK
- Cole, G.D.H. [1917] 1911. *The World of Labour: A discussion of the present and future of trade unionism*. Routledge: New York
- Cole, M. 1961. *The Story of Fabian Socialism*. Heineman Educational Books Ltd.: London

Cooper, D. 1991. "Locating South Africa in the Third World: Comparative perspectives on patterns of industrialisation and political trade unionism in South America and South Africa" in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 17, No. 2

Cooper, L. 1998. "From 'Rolling Mass Action' to 'RPL': the changing discourse of experience and learning in the South African labour movement" in *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2

Copi, I.M. and C. Cohen. 1990. *Introduction to Logic*. Macmillan: United States

Cronin, J. 1991. "Preparing Ourselves for Permanent Opposition?" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No 7

C.W. 1961. "Workers' Control: Looking for a movement" in *Anarchy*, No. 2

Cl@ss War Classix. 2010. "Editorial Introduction" in Murphy, J.T. 1917. *The Workers Committee: An outline of its principles and structure*. Mayday Politics and Books: Bishop Auckland, UK

Davie, G. 2007. "Strength in Numbers: The Durban student Wages Commission, dockworkers and the poverty datum line, 1971-1973" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2

Denzin, N. K. 1978 *The Research Act*. McGraw-Hill: New York

Desai, A. and H. Bohmke. 1997. "The Death of the Intellectual, the Birth of the Salesman: The South African intellectual during the democratic transition" in *Debate*, No. 3

Devers, K. and R. Frankel. 2002 "Study Design in Qualitative Research 2: Sampling and data collection strategies" in *Education for Health*, Vol. 13, No. 2

The Dielo Trouda Group. 1926. *The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists*. Unpublished paper, available at <struggle.ws/platform/plat_preface.html>

Dwyer, P. 2009. "South Africa under the ANC: Still bound to the chains of exploitation" in Zeilig (ed.). *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*. Haymarket Books: Chicago

Eidelberg, P.G. 2000. "The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millennium: Cosatu, the ANC and the SACP" in Barchiesi and Bramble (eds.). *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*. MacMillan: Great Britain

Engels, F. [1873] 1972. "The Bakuninists at Work: an account of the Spanish revolt in the summer of 1873" in Kolpinsky, N. Y. (ed.). *Marx, Engels, Lenin: anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism*. Progress Publishers: Moscow

Engels, F. 2001. "Letters, Notes" in *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. 48*, International Publishers: New York

Everatt, D. 1991. "Alliance Politics of a Special Type: the roots of the ANC/SACP alliance, 1950-54" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1

- Femia, J. 2007. "Western Marxism" in Glaser, D. and D. Walker (ed.). *Twentieth Century Marxism: A global introduction*. Routledge: London and New York
- Flanders, A. 1972. "What are Trade Unions for?" in McCarthy, W. (ed.). *Trade Unions*. Penguin: Harmondsworth
- Foner, P.S. 1965. *History of the labour movement in the United States: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-11*. International Publishers Co. Inc.: United States
- Forrest, K. 2007. "Power, Independence and Worker Democracy in the Development of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) and its Predecessors". PhD Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand
- Friedman, M. 2011. '*The Future is in the Hands of the Workers*': *A history of Fosatu*. Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust: Johannesburg
- Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today: African workers in trade unions 1970 – 1984*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg
- Gallacher, W. and J. Paton. [1917] 1920. *Towards Industrial Democracy: A memorandum of workshop control*. Paisley Trades and Labour Council: Paisley
- Gallin, D. and P. Horn. March 2005. "Organising Informal Women Workers". Unpublished paper, available at <http://www.streetnet.org.za/docs/research/2005/en/informalwomenworkers.pdf>
- Genovese, E. 1971. *In Red and Black: Marxian explorations in Southern and Afro-American history*. Pantheon Books: New York
- Gerber, J. 1988. "From Left Radicalism to Council Communism: Anton Pannekoek and German revolutionary Marxism" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 23
- Gerhart, G. and M.C. Glaser. 2010. *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882 – 1990*. Indiana University Press: USA
- Ginsburg, M. 1997. "Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African labour movement". Masters Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand
- Godfrey, S., Maree, J., Du Toit, D. and J. Theron. 2010. *Collective Bargaining in South Africa: past, present and future?* Juta and Co. Ltd: Cape Town
- Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart: London
- Greenstein, R. 2003. *Research Methods Training Manual*. Unpublished paper.
- Goertz, G. 2006. *Social Science Concepts: A user's guide*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey
- Gombin, R. 1978. *The Radical Tradition: a study in revolutionary thought*. Methuen and Co. Ltd.: Bristol

- Gombin, R. 1975. *The Origins of Modern Leftism*. Penguin: Hammondsworth
- Gordon, A. 1992. "The Influence of Syndicalism on the South African Working Class". Masters Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand
- Gorter, H. 1978. "The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle", in Smart, D.A. (ed.). *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism*. Pluto Press: London
- Gouldner, A. 1980. *The Two Marxisms*. Seabury Press: New York
- Guerin, D. 1971. *No Gods No Masters: an anthology of anarchism, Vol. 2*. AK Press: San Francisco
- Holton, R.J. 1980. "Syndicalist Theories of the State" in *Sociological Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1
- Harman, C. 1977. "Gramsci versus Eurocommunism" in *International Socialism*, No. 98, May edn., available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1977/05/gramsci1.html>>
- Hemson, D., Legassick M., and N. Ulrich. 2006. "White Activists and the Revival of the Workers' Movement" in SADET (ed.). *The Road to Democracy, Vol. 2, 1970-1980*. Unisa Press: Johannesburg
- Henderson, J. 1978. "An Infantile Disorder?: The crisis and decline of the New Left" in *Sociology*, Vol. 12
- Hirsch, S. and L. van der Walt. (eds.). 2010. *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940*. Brill: Leiden
- Horvat, B, Makorvic, M. and R. Supac. 1975. *Self-Governing Socialism: A reader*. International Arts and Sciences Press: New York
- Hyman, R. 1971. *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*. Pluto Press: London
- Hyman, R. 1975. "Foreword" in Goodrich, C.L. *The Frontier of Control: A study in British workshop politics*. Pluto Press: London
- Innes, D. 1982. "Trade Unions and the Challenge to State Power" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No 2,
- Isserman, M. 1987. *If I had a Hammer... The death of the Old Left and the birth of the New Left*. Basic Books Inc. Publishers: New York
- Jick, T.D. 1979. "Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in action" in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4
- Jochelson, K. 1990. "Reform, Repression and Resistance in South Africa: a case study of Alexandra township, 1979-1989" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1
- Johnson, S. 1989. *South Africa: No turning back*. MacMillan: London

- Kaufman, B.E. 2006. *The Global Evolution of Industrial Relations: events, ideas and the IIRA*. Academic Foundation: India
- Kemp, T. 1999. *Historical Patterns of Industrialization*. Longman: London
- Kitchell, M. 1990. *Berkley in the Sixties* (film). Kitzell Films: Berkeley
- Kraak, G. 1992. *Breaking the Chains: Labour in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s*. University of Michigan Press: United States
- Lacom. No date. *Freedom From Below: the struggle for trade unions in South Africa*. Sached: Durban
- Lang, K. and G. Lang. 1961. *Collective Dynamics*. Crowell: New York
- La Hausse, P. 1990. "Oral History and the South African Historians" in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7
- Legassick, M. 2008. "Debating the Revival of the Workers' Movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and post-apartheid patriotic history" in *Kronos*, Vol. 34, No. 1
- Lenin, VI. 2005. *The Birth of Bolshevism: Lenin's struggle against economism*. Resistance Books: Australia
- Lenin, VI. [1902] 1961. "What is to Be Done?: Burning questions of our movement" in *Lenin's Collected Works*. Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>>
- Levy, C. 1998. "Charisma and Social Movements: Errico Malatesta and Italian anarchism" in *Modern Italy*, Vol. 3, No 2
- Levy, K. 1999. *Gramsci and the Anarchists*. Berg Publishers: United Kingdom
- Lewis, J. 1985. "Review: *POWER! Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 4
- Lewis, J. 1991. "South African Labour History: A historiographical assessment" in Brown, J. (ed.). *History from South Africa: alternative visions and practices*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia
- Lewis, J. 1983. "South African Labour History: A historiographical assessment" in *Radical History Review*, No. 46-47
- Lodge, T. and B. Nasson. 1991. *All Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. David Phillip: Johannesburg
- Lowry, D. 1999. *Twenty Years in the Labour Movement: the Urban Training Project in South Africa, 1971-1991*. Wadmore: Johannesburg

- Lynd, S. 1969. "The New Left" in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 382
- Lunn, H. 2010. "'Hippies, Radicals and the Sounds of Silence': Cultural dialectics at two South African universities 1966-1976". PhD Dissertation. University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard Campus
- Maree, J. 1986. "An Analysis of the Independent Trade Unions in South Africa in the 1970s". PhD Dissertation. University of Cape Town
- Maree, J. 1982. "Democracy and Oligarchy in trade unions: The independent trade unions in the Transvaal and the Western province General Workers' Union in the 1970s" in *Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1
- Maree, J. 2006. "Similarities and Differences between Rebels With and Without a Cause" in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 54, No. 3
- Maree, J. 2006. "Rebels with Causes: White officials in black trade unions in South Africa, 1973-94: a response to Sakhela Buhlungu" in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 54, No. 3
- Marshall, P. 2008. *Demanding the Impossible: A history of anarchism*. PM Press: California
- Mattick Jr, P. 1975. "Old Left, New Left, What's Left?" in Brechen *et al* (eds.). *Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*. Fawcett Publications: United States
- Mattick Jr, P. 1978. "Karl Korsch: His contribution to revolutionary Marxism" in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*. Merlin Press: London
- Maximoff, G.P. 1952. *Constructive Anarchism: the debate on the platform*. Maximoff Memorial Publication Committee: Chicago
- Maxwell, J. A. 2008. "Designing a Qualitative Study" in Bickman, L. and D. Rog (eds.). *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods, 2nd edn*. Sage Publications: California
- Mayekiso, M. 1996. *Township Politics: Civic struggles for a new South Africa*. Monthly Review Press: New York
- McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. and A. Campbell. 2008. *The High tide of British trade Unionism: trade unions and industrial politics, 1964-79*. Merlin Press: California
- McIlroy, J. 1995. *Trade Unions in Britain Today*. Manchester University Press: Manchester
- McKay Cammett, J. 1967. *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. Stanford University Press: California
- McNally, D. 1993. "E P Thompson: class struggle and historical materialism" in *International Socialism*, No. 61
- McShane, D., Ward, D., and M. Plaut. *Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*. South End Press: Boston

- Michels, R. 1915. *Political Parties*. Hearst's International Library Co.: New York
- Milkman, R. and K. Voss. 2004. *Rebuilding Labour: Organising and organisers in the new union movement*. Cornell University Press: USA
- Milliband, R. 2003. *Marxism and Politics*. Merlin Press: United States
- Mosenthal, D. 1998. "Flight from Class and Principle: An examination of Alliance politics and the role of intellectuals in struggle, towards a discussion of the relation between theoretical conceptualisation of struggle and academic Marxist processes of thought". Honours Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand
- Miriamposki, H. and D. Hughes. 1978. "The Use of Personal Documents in Historical Sociology" in *The American Sociologist*, No. 13
- Munck, R. 1989. *The New International Labour Studies: An introduction*. Zed Books: London
- Murphy, J.T. 1917. *The Workers' Committee: An outline of its principles and Structure*. Mayday Publishers and Books: Bishop Auckland, UK
- Nash, A. 1999. "The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XIX, No. 1
- Ncube, D. 1985. *Black Trade Unions*. Skotaville Publishers: Johannesburg
- Ndlozi, M. 2010. "Trade Unionism in South Africa: A critical assessment of trade union strategy, the case of the CWIU, 1987-1999". Masters Research Report. University of the Witwatersrand
- Neocosmos, M. 1998 "From People's Politics to State Politics" in Olukoshi, A.O. (ed.). *The Politics of Opposition in Africa*. Northern Africa Institute: Uppsala
- Nhere. 1984. "The Dangers of 'Legal Marxism' in South Africa" in *African Communist*, No. 99
- Nove, A. 1977. *The Soviet Economic System*. Allen and Unwin: London
- Nove, A. 1990. *Studies in Economics and Russia*. St. Martin's Press: New York
- Nurse-Bray, P. 1995. "Malatesta and the Anarchist Revolution" in *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1
- Orwell, G. 1936. *Shooting an Elephant*. Unpublished paper, available at <http://www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/writing/Resources/essays/elephant.html>
- Ostergaard, J. 1961. "Approaches to Industrial Democracy" in *Anarchy*, No. 2
- Ostergaard, P. 2006. "Overcoming Oligarchy: Culture and agency in social movement organisations" in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, No. 51

- Panitch, L. 1996. "Cosatu and Corporatism: a reply to Webster" in *South Africa Report Archive*, Vol. 11, No. 3, available at <<http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=3885>>
- Pillay, D. 2008. "Cosatu, the SACP and the ANC in post-Polokwane: Looking left but does it feel right?" in *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol. 41, No. 2
- Pillay, D. 1991. "The Workers Charter Campaign" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 5
- Piven, F. and R. Cloward. 1977. *Poor People's Movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. Vintage: New York
- Plaut, M. 1992. "Debates in a Shark Tank: The politics of South Africa's non-racial trade unions" in *African Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 364
- Posel, D. 1983. "Rethinking the 'Race-Class Debate' in South African Historiography" in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 9 No. 1
- Ramphela, M. 1995. *Mamphela Ramphela: A Life*. David Phillip: Cape Town
- Renton, D. 2004. *Dissident Marxism*. Zed Books: London
- Ritchken, E. 1989. "Trade Unions and Community Organisations: Towards a working alliance?" in *Transformation*, No. 10
- Robertson, J. 2009. "Ups and Downs of the Rank and File" in *International Socialism*, No. 12, available at <<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=515&issue=121>>
- Rocker, R. 2004. *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, AK Press: Edinburgh
- Saunders, C. 1988. *The Making of the South African Past: major historians on race and class*. David Philips Publishers: Cape Town, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/saunders/making-past/ch16.htm>>
- Schmidt, A. 1973. *Oligarchy in Fraternal Organizations: A study in organizational leadership*. Gale Research Company: Detroit
- Schreiner, G. 1987. "Cosatu Strategy in Natal" in *Work in Progress*, No. 47
- Seekings, J. 1992. "From Quiescence to 'People's Power: Township politics in Kagiso 1985 – 6" in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 18, No. 1
- Seekings, J. 1989. "People's Courts and Popular Politics" in Moss, G. and I. Obery. (eds.). *South African Review 5*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg
- Seekings, J. 2000. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*. David Phillip: South Africa

- Seekings, J. 1992. “‘Trailing Behind the Masses’: The United Democratic Front and township politics in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal region, 1983-4” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1
- Seidman, S. 2004. *Contested Knowledge: Social theory today*. Blackwell Publishing: United Kingdom
- Selznick, P. 1943. “An Approach to a Theory of Bureaucracy” in *American Sociological Review*, No. 8
- Sheehan, H. 2009. “Contradictory Transformations: observations on the intellectual dynamics of South African universities” in *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, Vol. 7, No.1, available at <doras.dcu.ie/4537/1/jceps-doras.pdf>
- Showstack Sassoon, A. 1988. “The Gramsci Boom Continues” in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 26
- Shuman, H. 2002. “Sense and Nonsense About Surveys” in *Contexts*, Vol. 40, No. 7
- Sideris, T. 1984. “Trade Union Newspapers” in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No 8
- Simon, R. 2007. “Eurocommunism” in Glaser, D., and D. Walker (eds.). *Marxism: a twentieth century perspective*. Routledge, United Kingdom
- Siriani, C. 1983. *Workers Democracy: the Soviet Experience*. New Left Books: London
- Sithole, J. 2009. “Contestations over Knowledge Production or Ideological Bullying?: a response to Legassick on the workers' movement” in *Kronos*, Vol. 35, No. 1
- Sithole, J. and Ndlovu, S. 2006 “The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980” in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy Vol. 2, 1970-1980*. Unisa Press: Johannesburg
- Skocpol, T. 1982. “Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology” in Skocpol (ed.). *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom
- Southall, R. 1995. *Imperialism or Solidarity? International labour and South African trade unions*. University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town
- Steinhart, 1988. “South African Labour and International Support” in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, September edn.
- Suttner, R. 2004. “Legacies and Meanings of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Period for Contemporary South Africa (Review)” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3
- Suttner, R. 2004. “The UDF Period and its Meaning for Contemporary South Africa” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3
- Thatcher, I.D. 2007. “Left Communism: Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky compared” in Glaser, D., and D. Walker (eds.). *Twentieth Century Marxism: A Global Introduction*. Routledge: USA and Canada

Thorpe. 2011. "Challenging the Cultural Legitimation of War: International syndicalists in Europe 1914 – 18" in *Socialist History*, No. 37

Tilly, L.A. 1979. "Gramsci and Factory Councils" in *International Labour and Working Class History*, Vol. 14

Trudell, M. 2007. "Gramsci: the Turin years" in *International Socialism*, No. 114, available at <<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=306>>

Turner, R. 1978. *The Eye of the Needle: Towards participatory democracy in South Africa*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg

Turner, R. 1971. *The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought*. SPRO-CAS: South Africa

Ulrich, N. 2003. "The Origins of the Fosatu: The emergence of trade unions in Natal and the development of a new trade union tradition", Unpublished Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, available at <<http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/PDF%20Files/wirs%20-%20ulrich.PDF>>

Ulrich, N. 2007. "Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: The origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (Tuacc), 1970-1979", Masters Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand.

Ulrich, N. and L. Van Der Walt. 2009. "South Africa, labour movement" in Immanuel Ness (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of Revolution and Protest*. Blackwell Publishing: United States

Van Der Linden, M. *Workers of the World: Essays toward a global labour history*. Brill: Boston

van der Walt, L. 2010. "Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defence: debating *Black Flame*, revolutionary anarchism and historical Marxism" in *International Socialism*, No. 130, available at <<http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=729>>

van der Walt, L. and M. Schmidt. 2007. *Black Flame: The revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*. AK Press: Edinburgh

van der Walt, L.J.W. 2007. "Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904-1921: Rethinking the history of labour and the left". PhD Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand

Von Holdt, K. 1987. "Trade Unions, Community Organisations and Politics: a local case study on the East Rand" in Sociology of Work Institute Research Report 3, Unpublished paper, Johannesburg

Voss, K. and R. Sherman. 2000. "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union revitalisation in the American labour movement" in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 2

Walton, J. and D. Seddon. 1994. *Free Markets and Food Riots: The politics of global adjustment*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford and Cambridge

Webb, S. and B. Webb. [1897] 1920. *Industrial Democracy*. Longmans Green: London

Weber, H. 1977. "The State and the Transition to Socialism: interview with Nicos Poulantzas" in *Critique Communiste*, No. 16, June edn.

Webster, E. 1993. "Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction: Richard Turner and radical reform" in *Theoria*, Vol. 81, No. 2, October edn.

Webster, E. 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg

Webster, E. 1997. "The Intellectual's Dilemma: To Serve or to Criticize", University of the Witwatersrand Sociology Department Occasional Paper #10, Unpublished paper, Johannesburg

Williams, G.A. 1975. *A Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, the factory councils and the origins of Italian Communism, 1911-1921*. Pluto Press: London.

Wolpe, H. 1972. "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From segregation to apartheid" in *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4

Woodhouse, M. 1966. "Syndicalism, Communism and the Trade Unions in Britain, 1910-1926" in *Marxist*, Vol. 4, No. 3, available at
<<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/history/Syndicalism.html>>.

Woods, A. 1999. *Bolshevism: The Road to Revolution: A history of the Bolshevik Party from the early beginnings to the October Revolution*. Wellread Books: University of Michigan

Young, N. 1977. *An Infantile Disorder?: The crisis and decline of the New Left*. Routledge and Keagan and Paul: London

Zeitlin, J. 1980. "The Emergence of Shop Steward Organization and Job Control in the British Car Industry: A review essay" in *History Workshop*, No. 10, autumn edn.

Newspaper Articles

Bell, T. 2006. "Cosatu goes to Congress riven by worst dissent in 20 years" in *Business Report*, available at
<<http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Cosatu,+How+I+miss+Moses+Mayekiso,+Terry+Bell,+Business+Report>>

The Witness. 15th April 2010. "John Harris, hardly a martyr", available at
<[http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global\[_id\]=38916](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global[_id]=38916)>

SAPA. 1997. "Apartheid Officials Tried to keep Black Figures off TV", available at
<<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media/1997/9709/s970915a.htm>>

Websites:

Disa Website, available at: <http://Disa.nu.ac.za/index.php?option=com_browse&rid=jou>

History Workshop, official website, available at
<<http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/socialsciences/8324/historyworkshop.html>>

Images:

Fosatu's launch in Hammanskraal in 1979. Fosatu Archives, AH 2680/A40

Alec Erwin and June Rose Nala at a Fosatu Rally in Northern Natal, 1980. Fosatu Archives. AH 2680/ D21

Fosatu Logo. Fosatu Archives. AH 2680/H5

Police attack Frame Workers, 22nd May 1980. *The South African Institute of Race Relations*. AD 1788/ 11B2

Comrade Moss, Learn and Teach, May 1989

Fosatu worker choir. Fosatu Archives. AH 2680/H5

Henkel Workers on Strike. Taffy Adler Papers, AH 2065/J60

Fosatu Education Workshop Poster, 1985. AH 2555/F13

Fosatu Executive at Wilgespruit. Fosatu Archives, AH 2680/D38