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Shop floor challenges, opportunities and strategies of shop steward in post-apartheid South Africa : a case study of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA).

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University of the Witwatersrand

The Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Shop floor challenges, opportunities and strategies of shop steward in Post-apartheid South Africa:
A case study of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)

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Abstract

There is general consensus that the reorganisation of production and labour processes and shift in union ideological focus and growth of bureaucratic structures have resulted in the diminishing of a collective voice at most workplaces. This study explores the challenges facing shop stewards at the shop floor in their day to day activities in the aftermath of these changes and examines ways through which they get around them. The day to day activities of shop stewards is not a new phenomenon. However shop stewards have not been targeted as subject for study since democratisation. Where they were mentioned, it was mostly due to their involvement at the shop floor where they are required to carry the workers grievances to the management as well as explaining union standpoint to constituent. The study affirms arguments by previous researchers that shop stewards play a contradictory role, trying to satisfy the aspirations of the constituents who elected the stewards as well as management, the stewards' pay master who expect the steward to be a social partner, though the relationship is highly unequal. The study noted that though they are social partners, management is insincere when it comes to work environment where it's not meeting the minimum safety requirements. Moreover, union bureaucratic structures though they are meant to increase efficiency have wiped shop floor democracy since decisions are mostly handed down from the top, confirming the argument that as organisations grows bigger, they tend towards oligarchy. In-depth interviews were conducted at one plant in Wadeville and another on in Nigel local of NUMSA's Ekurhuleni region. The interviews were complemented with documentary analysis as well as observation during shop steward council meetings.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Industrial Sociology-Labour Policies and Globalisation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

_____ _____ day of

_____ 2011 Nunurayi Mutyanda

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my two daughters; Kundai and Kudzai; my spouse, Violet and my mother Nakai.

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I am greatly indebted to individuals and institutions that assisted in various ways; enabling me to complete this research project.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC-	Africa National Congress
AZACTU-	Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions
BEE-	Black Economic Empowerment
BCEA-	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CEO-	Chief Executive Officers
CBA-	Collective bargaining agreements
CCMA-	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
CONSAWU-	Confederation of South African Worker's Union
COSATU-	Congress of South Africa Trade Union
CUSA-	Council of Unions of South Africa
DITSELA-	Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour
FORCE-	Federation of Organisations Representing Civil Employees
FOSATU-	Federation of South Africa Trade Unions
FEDSAL-	Federation of South African Labour Union
FEDUSA-	Federation of Trade Unions South Africa
GAWU-	General and Allied Workers Union
GEAR-	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
ICU-	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ICEMF-	International Chemical, Energy and Mining Federation
ICFTU-	International Confederation of Free Trade union,
IMWF-	International Metalworkers Federation
IR-	Industrial Relations

LRA-	Labour Relations Act
MD-	Managing Director
MAWU-	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MICWU-	Motor Industry Combined Workers Union
NAAWU-	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NACTU-	National Council of Trade Unions
NEDLAC-	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEC -	National Executive Committee
NEF-	National Economic Forum
NALEDI-	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NUMSA-	National Union of Metalworkers South Africa
NMC-	National Manpower Commission
NEHAWU-	Health and Allied Workers Union
OHS-	Occupational Health and Safety
REC-	Regional Executive Committee
RDP-	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP-	South African Communist Party
SATUCC-	Southern African Coordinating Council
TUCSA-	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TGWU-	Transport and General Workers Union
UDF-	United Democratic Front
UMMAWOSA-	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa
UCW-	Union Carriage and Wagon