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TRADE UNION RESPONSES TO PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY

Maxwell Sakhela Buhlungu

Degree awarded with distinction on 4 December 1996.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Sociology).

February 1996

Abstract:

This thesis is an investigation of trade union responses to participatory management in South Africa. In examining the above question, it seeks to establish whether Weber's notion of bureaucracy and Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding these responses by unions. The thesis also explores the possibilities of worker participation in which unions (and their members) benefit without losing the ability to represent workers' collective interests.

There are three main conclusions made in this thesis. Firstly, the theories of bureaucracy and oligarchy do not provide an adequate framework for understanding union responses to new managerial strategies on the shopfloor. This thesis argues for a more rigorous approach which takes on board the dynamics of union action and governance. Union members are not passive and apathetic subjects, but active participants who possess capacities to conceptualise and make interventions in union decision-making processes.

Secondly, the co-option or triumph of labour is not an inevitable consequence of any change process. All initiatives for change, whether they emanate from management or from the union and its members, always present opportunities and dangers for labour. In this regard the notion of radical reform is useful as it helps us avoid the dualism of 'incorporation' versus 'the advance of labour'.

Finally, for unions to engage meaningfully in debates about participation and workplace democratisation, the capacities of its members and structures need to be developed.

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I has not been submitted before for any other degree in any other university.

Maxwell Sakhela Buhlungu

12 th day of FEBRUARY, 1996

To the memory of my mother

Naurinah Nkosazana

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS:

ANC	African National Congress
BAWU	Black and Allied Workers' Union
BEC	Branch executive committee
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation/Office
ITISA	Interdependence and Transformation in South Africa
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NALEDI	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NEC	National executive committee
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEF	National Economic Forum
NMC	National Manpower Commission
NOB	National Office-Bearer
NOBC	National Office-Bearer's Committee
NUFAW	National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUPAWO	National Union of Printing and Allied Workers
PWAWU	Paper Wood and Allied Workers' Union
PPWAWU	Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union
SAAPAWU	South African Agricultural, Plantation and Allied Workers' Union
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers' Union
SACCAWU	South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union
SARHWU	South African Railways and Harbours Workers' Union
SATU	South African Typographical Union
TPQ	Total Productivity and Quality
UDF	United Democratic Front
UWUSA	United Workers' Union of South Africa
VAT	Value Added Tax

This thesis is an attempt to grapple with some of the complexities which South African trade unions face during the transition to democracy. My interest in these issues dates back to the time when I worked for the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) as a full-time official. When PG Bison, a company whose employees were members of PPWAWU, introduced a programme called Total Productivity and Quality (TPQ) in the late 1980s, the union faced a challenge which no South African union had faced before, namely, how to respond to the new strategy. Through TPQ, PG Bison management offered worker participation to its employees but it deliberately left the national union out of these initiatives. Union members in PG Bison workplaces responded enthusiastically to the offer while branch and national leaders of PPWAWU opposed the move. In August 1990 I was one of the PPWAWU full-time officials who attended a PG Bison national shop stewards' conference in Broederstroom, north east of Johannesburg. Some management representatives also attended this meeting. It had been called at PPWAWU's initiative to discuss management's new strategy and to try and slow down what the union saw as co-option of its shop stewards and members by PG Bison. I, together with the other officials, went into the meeting armed with a decision by the union's national executive committee (NEC) to have the process suspended until it had been fully negotiated with the union. Indeed, when the meeting closed after two days of intense, and sometimes acrimonious debates between union officials and some shop stewards and between union representatives and management, PG Bison' TPQ had been suspended pending fresh negotiations between the two parties. But, despite this suspension, TPQ continued in many plants with many union members participating actively in TPQ activities.

For me that was one of the puzzles of the PG Bison experience. Even at the Broederstroom meeting many shop stewards were speaking a different language to that of the union. Not only were they in favour of what management was doing but they were also questioning the NEC's right to decide on a matter they said should be decided by workers and their elected representatives on the shop floor. The crucial question for me therefore was, what is it

about the new management strategy that gives rise to these contradictions within the union?

The idea to do research on the topic of this thesis was born two years after this PG Bison shop stewards conference when I left PPWAWU and registered for an MA in sociology at Wits University. I had almost forgotten about the PG Bison conference and I had chosen to do my thesis on trade union education. While I was still conceptualising the topic into a research proposal I had a discussion with Eddie Webster, head of the Department of Sociology and director of the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP). A couple of weeks before this discussion PG Bison's chief executive, Leon Cohen, had given a presentation to a SWOP breakfast seminar on the change processes in the company. Professor Webster said he found the presentation interesting and asked if I was not interested in doing my research on the subject. I saw this as a challenge to find answers to questions which had been a puzzle to me during my involvement with PPWAWU and PG Bison. I immediately took up the idea and changed my research topic. However, I decided not to limit myself to PG Bison but to also look at Nampak, another company which started to experiment with participatory management in the early 1990s. What finally became the title for this thesis was influenced in part by the concerns I had back in 1990. This project therefore offered me an opportunity to explore the issues more systematically. As will become clear from reading this thesis the processes at PG Bison and Nampak are approached by looking at the union's strategies and capacities. It is hoped that it has succeeded in shedding light on union organisation and how this impacts on the way unions respond to new management initiatives on the shopfloor.

The principal objective of this study was to investigate union response to and strategies on participatory management as introduced by a number of companies in South Africa. In examining this question the study also sought to establish whether Max Weber's notion of bureaucracy and or Robert Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding this response by trade unions. The third objective of this study was to explore the possibilities of worker participation in which workers and their union benefit without losing the ability to represent workers' collective interests.

The underlying research question is whether union response to participatory management and other initiatives by management on the shopfloor takes a bureaucratic or oligarchic form as predicted by Weber and Michels. This study concludes that, given the particular history and entrenched democratic traditions and practices in the post-1973 independent unions in South Africa, it is unlikely union response to shopfloor issues will take a bureaucratic form. The independent trade union movement's emphasis on worker control, democratic decision-making and the primacy given to shopfloor rank and file membership in policy formulation offer opportunities for a more dynamic union strategy and response which is a result of democratic participation by and interaction between the various structures of the union from the shopfloor upwards - the membership, shop stewards, branch structures and branch officials and national structures and officials.

The subject of union response to participatory management raises key questions in sociology, particularly the sociology of trade unionism. One of these is the question of organisation and governance, i.e. how a trade union functions, the relationship of rank and file members to leadership, the relationship between factory floor structures to branch and national structures and decision-making processes in a trade union. A discussion of how a trade union responds to a particular issue inevitably emails a discussion of internal democracy within the union. Thus the examination of the subject of this study is simultaneously an investigation of the processes of governance and decision-making within the trade union.

The context in which the independent unions emerged in the early 1970s was a shopfloor dominated by with what Webster (1985) has termed 'racial despotism'[1]. Webster calls this factory regime racial because it relied on the domination of one racial group by another, and despotic because coercion - physical and economic - prevailed over consent.[2] Few studies have been done on the South African workplace prior to the 1980s, but studies like Webster's point to a prevalence of authoritarian and racist structures of control on the shopfloor. These structures of control were reinforced by a highly repressive apartheid state machinery in the broader society. Apartheid not only ensured power and privilege for whites and deprivation for blacks in the wider society, but it also served to

bolster unequal power relations between those who own and control the means of production and those who sell their labour power in return for a wage at the workplace. This interconnection between power, privilege and ownership of the means of production on the one hand, and powerlessness, social and economic deprivation on the other, at both the workplace and in the broader society shaped the character and the strategies of the post-1973 unions. It is this apparent fusion of economic exploitation and political oppression which has given rise to what Lambert and Webster (1988) have termed political or social movement unionism in South Africa.[3] Within the workplace these unions have been fighting for basic issues such as recognition, improvement to wages and working conditions and basic trade union rights such as the right to strike and to bargain on behalf of their members. In addition, the unions have been in the forefront of the political struggle against the repressive apartheid system.

Up until the mid-1980s the struggles and strategies of the unions which emerged in the early 1970s were characterised by resistance, with conflict and confrontation being the dominant mode of challenging the power of employers and the state. Many union activists believed that by intensifying the class struggle and raising the consciousness of the working class generally the working class struggle would eventually lead to a revolutionary rupture and the establishment of a socialist order.[4] For many within and outside the labour movement the alternative to economic exploitation and authoritarian workplace regimes was the destruction of apartheid and capitalism and the creation of a socialist society where the means of production would be socially owned and a working class-dominated democratic system would be put in place.[5]

However, from the mid-1980s onwards there have been a number of changes in South Africa and globally, chief among which are growth in trade union strength, the democratisation of the broader society and increasing exposure to global competition. It is the combination of these factors which have induced many companies to show an interest in shifting away from authoritarian workplace regimes towards some form of co-operative arrangements which include a degree of participation by workers in the running of the affairs of the factory and in the performance of their tasks. Fox (1970) has argued that the

primary reason why management embraces worker participation is to establish a basis for the "legitimacy of authority relations".[6] Fox's argument offers a useful explanation why in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, management initiates worker participation even though the demand for greater participation in decisions originates in the labour movement. While the objective of workers and the labour movement is to curb the managerial prerogative, Fox maintains that managements have not been reconciled to the prospect of losing this prerogative to manage and control and thus their effort to establish legitimacy is simultaneously an attempt to protect their managerial prerogative. He further asserts that worker participation schemes are nothing more than mere "personnel panaceas" whose objective is to "convince employees that they have the substance of participation and influence while in fact giving them only the shadow".[7]

In South Africa worker participation schemes come in many forms and each factory or company embarks on these schemes for a number of reasons. This study is based on research done at two South African companies which have been implementing worker participation strategies in their plants. The focus of the research was the union rather than management or the management strategies per se. However, the issues raised by Fox will be discussed again in chapters 3 and 4 as part of the evaluation of evidence from the two plants.

In the course of this study a number of related, but often discrete, themes have been explored. The treatment of these themes follows the structure and the sequence of the chapters in this thesis. These themes have served a very important role not only of delineating the various aspects of the research problem but also as important tools with which to assess whether the objectives of this thesis have been achieved. Below is a summary of the main themes addressed in the discussion and the chapters in which they are to be found.

Union organisation and democratic decision-making (Chapter 1): A critique of Michels' and Weber's theories of democratic decision-making (oligarchy and bureaucracy respectively) is presented and an alternative approach proposed which sees decision-making

in organisations, particularly trade unions, as a dynamic process in which the various organisational structures of an organisation have an important role. It is argued in this study that this is the most useful approach to understanding trade union practice, including the way trade unions respond to management programmes and initiatives on the shopfloor. In this way we can avoid the pitfalls which result from seeing trade unions only as big national organisations led by big leaders who take big decisions which docile members are expected to implement without question.

Methodological Issues (Chapter 2): This chapter is a brief overview of the methods and methodological issues arising out of the research done for this study.

The response of the union to participation (Chapter 3): This is the central question which the study seeks to answer. Following the discussion in chapter 1, the question is posed thus: How has the union, in terms of its structures at factory, local, branch and national levels, been responding to the participatory management strategy? In answering the question consideration is given to issues of strategy, union capacity to deal with the complexities of the issue and tensions which often arise between the various structures or levels of the trade union. In this regard the study draws from empirical and other material gathered during the research.

The Unions' Notion of Industrial Democracy (Chapter 4): This study also analyses the union's notion of industrial democracy and the forms of worker participation that it envisages on the shopfloor. This is constructed not only from what the national and branch structures of the trade union have decided but also on the basis of what its rank and file membership on the shopfloor believe is a fair and just form of workplace governance. Such an understanding of industrial democracy is then compared and contrasted to new participatory management strategies in order to establish whether the latter can in any way advance the unions' and the workers' view of industrial democracy.

An Assessment of the Union's Response (Chapter 5): From the broad perspectives on participatory management mentioned above, this chapter explores options available to the

union. In discussing these options the tensions which may arise as well as the pitfalls are discussed. This chapter also assesses the union's capacity to meet the challenges of new management strategies like participatory management. Finally, this chapter makes recommendations for a union strategy which avoids some of the pitfalls identified in this thesis.

Acknowledgements:

A lot of people contributed directly and indirectly to the success of this project. Special thanks go to PPWAWU, its leaders, shop stewards, officials and members for their support and willingness to give of their time and ideas at various stages of the research. Not only did they allow me access to their members and documents, in some cases shop stewards and officials facilitated access into factories.

I would also like to thank Nampak and PG Bison management for granting me access into their factories to interview both workers and managers. In particular, I must thank Neil Cumming and Gwynn Pricket of Nampak head office and Jim Smith, formerly of PG Bison head office, for having facilitated access to the factories of their respective companies.

Many people, through discussion, advice and guidance, have helped to shape my views and sharpen my theoretical insights during the course of this research. In particular I wish to express my gratitude to the following people: Professor Eddie Webster who not only encouraged me to undertake research on this particular subject but continued to be an inspiration till the end; Judy Maller who supervised my work during the early stages and provided invaluable advice and assistance in conceptualising the methodological issues of the research; Dr Gay Seidman who has remained a source of encouragement and advice throughout the term of the project; Dr Orieji Chimere-Dan assisted me with the technical aspects of quantitative research methodology. And last, but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Glenn Adler for his readiness to guide and advise and for the rigorous comments he made on the draft thesis.

Throughout this project the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) and the Sociology Department at Wits University provided me with the intellectual environment in which new questions continued being posed thereby helping me to approach all possible angles to this topic.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author alone and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development or any of the people and institutions mentioned here.

Finally, I must thank my family for the support and encouragement they have given to me throughout this project. No words can express my appreciation of their love and support in this endeavour.

ENDNOTES:

1. Webster, E. (1987) "The Workplace in a Changing South Africa: A Sociological Perspective", in The Co[illegible]ution of Social Work in South Africa: Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Conference. 6 - 7 July 1987.

2. ibid., p. 125

3. According to Lambert and Webster, political unionism is "a form of unionism that facilitates an active engagement in factory-based, production politics and in community *and* state power issues". Lambert, R. and Webster, E. (1988) "The Re-emergence of Political Unionism in Contemporary South Africa?", in Cobbett, W. and Cohen, R. (eds) (1988) Popular Struggles in South Africa, London: James Currey, p. 21.

4. See for example, National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA (1987) "Numsa's Political Resolutions", in SA Labour Bulletin, 12, 5, 1987.

5. See for example Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) (1987) "Ccawusa Congress", in SA Labour Bulletin, 12, 5, 1987. Turner, R. (1980) The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in South Africa, Johannesburg: Ravan, also makes a strong case for a socialist system where the means of production are owned by the producers themselves (see pp. 48 - 65). Pityana and Orkin also show that the majority of shop stewards in COSATU favour an economic system based on nationalisation of major industries in the economy. See Pityana, S.M. and Orkin, M. (eds) (1992) Beyond the Factory Floor: A Survey of COSATU Shop-stewards, Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 67 - 69.

6. Fox, A (1970) A Sociology of Work Industry, London: Collier-Macmillian, p. 155.

7. ibid., pp. 158 - 159.

CHAPTER 1:

TRADE UNION ORGANISATION AND DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

Up until recently South African workplaces were characterised by autocratic and hierarchical regimes of labour control which allowed no scope for worker involvement in decision-making, both at the level of the firm and in the labour process at plant level. This control was further reinforced by various forms of control and discrimination based on race and ethnicity. Together, these forms of control gave birth to various resistance by the workforce, which at the turn of this century took higher forms as workers organised collectively into trade unions. It was this cycle of control and resistance which gave South African industrial relations an adversarial character, which had adverse effects on productivity and morale at workplace level.

However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s many companies introduced new strategies which were intended to bring about a more participatory style of management and greater involvement by the workforce in decision-making. While the pressures which forced these shifts were internal to the workplaces themselves, the prospect of political transition and the consequent re-entry of South Africa in the global economy with its competitive pressures, made it imperative for many companies to introduce these changes. PG Bison and Nampak were among the first companies to experiment with such change processes.

Although the trade union movement had been calling for greater worker participation in company decision-making processes, their response to the new strategies has been ambivalent and, in some instances, is characterised by tensions between rank and file union members on the one hand, and national leadership of the union, on the other.

This chapter is an attempt to theorise trade union responses to a variety of management strategies which have become known as participatory management. It examines whether the theories of bureaucracy and the 'iron law of oligarchy' provide a useful explanation of trade

union responses to this new management strategy. The union which organises PG Bison and Nampak workers is used as a case study for this thesis.

2. Democracy and Decision-Making in Trade Unions

This study examines the response of the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU), one of the independent unions which emerged in the post-1973 period, to participatory management. A discussion on this subject also implies an examination of the processes and structures of governance and decision-making in the union.

The principles and form of organisation that the independent unions adopted are based on democratic control and decision-making by the workers themselves with specific emphasis on active participation of members in shopfloor structures of the unit Direct democratic participation by members in decision-making is combined with representative democracy in which the shop steward plays a pivotal role in all structures of the union. Representative democracy in these unions emphasises accountability of leadership through regular elections and mandating and report back processes. Shop stewards and other leaders are subject to recall and other forms of disciplinary action if they are deemed to have acted outside of the mandate given by members. To guard against full-time officials accumulating disproportionate power and influence restrictions are placed on their voting and decision-making powers. Moreover, branch and national structures of the union are supposed to formulate policy on the basis of proposals from the rank and file membership. While this process of mandating has not worked very well with regard to a number of complex national issues facing the trade union movement, such as politics and broad economic policy issues[2], union members jealously guard their right to have a say on matters that affect them directly, like wage policies, union subscriptions and other union policies on shopfloor issues. These unions, which are mainly affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), belong to what Hyman (1971) called the "optimistic" tradition of trade unionism which regards unions as genuine representatives of the workers in the struggle for social transformation and as a school in democratic self-government by members.[3]

2.1 Michels and the Theory of Oligarchy

However, there is a school of thought which holds a pessimistic view of trade unionism and the amount of democratic decision-making that is possible with within trade unions and other social movements. Robert Michels' (1959) seminal study of political parties and trade unions took a pessimistic view on the question of internal democracy within social movements. His point of departure was his notion of the "iron law of oligarchy" which is based on the view that there are "immanent oligarchic tendencies" in every human organization.[4] He went on to assert that social movements begin by making solemn declarations about their commitment to democracy and justice. This, however, is just a "philanthropic mask" which obscures the real intentions of leaders to use the movement to achieve their own personal goals.[5]

Michels argued that the bigger the organisation, the more difficult it is to achieve self-government by the masses. Hence the need to appoint leaders who possess special attributes, particularly based on educational qualifications, who in the course of time become indispensable. This leadership or what Michels termed the "oligarchical camarilla" remain in power not only because of the apathy and ignorance of the masses ("The apathy of the masses and their need for guidance has as its counterpart in the leaders a natural greed for power."[6]), but also because of their ability to coerce the masses and suppress opposition or revolts. In a nutshell, Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' can be summarised thus: the growth in size and complexity of an organisation inevitably leads to a greater division of labour between the leaders and the led, which in turn leads to 'class' differentiation, goal displacement and conservatism by the leadership. In such circumstances democracy becomes an impossible dream while the rule of the oligarchy becomes an unavoidable reality.

Although the main subject of his discussion was political parties, Michels applied his theory to all organisations, including trade unions. Applied to trade unions, this theory implies that unions have an inherent tendency to develop 'oligarchies' of skilled full-time officials who take all decisions while the rank and file members lack the skills and information to develop policies and critically appraise the policies of the officials. According to Michels the apathy of the masses reinforces oligarchic control and abuse of power. Goal displacement occurs and the oligarchy confronts the masses as a "class" with its own interests and aspirations because, as

Michels argues, "Their own social revolution has already been effected".[7] Thus for the leader, the social revolution ceases to be the end of the workers' struggle and he/she becomes reconciled to the existing order. The leadership position (and the livelihood derived therefrom) becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end, and the leader become "indifferent and even hostile to all progressive aspirations in the democratic sense".[8]

2.2 Weber's Notion of Bureaucracy

In his earlier analysis of the development of society Max Weber developed the theory of 'rationalisation' which, he argued, is the motor of innovation and change. He argued that rationalisation based on science is a distinctive feature of capitalism where emphasis is put on technological innovation, efficient administration and rational calculation. Rationalisation of capitalist production in turn entails "unavoidable consequences in the sphere of social organisation, and inevitably fosters the spread of bureaucracy".[9] Thus rational specialisation also extends to government and other areas of society where complex organisations develop. Bureaucracy is defined as "the means of transforming social action into rationally organised action".[10] According to Weber the efficiency of a bureaucracy in the performance of its routine tasks is the main reason why it spreads and becomes indispensable, and it is impossible to reverse it in any society, capitalist or socialist, where efficient administration is an important goal.

According to Weber (1968), bureaucracy is not necessarily an anti-democratic development but is rather a condition for its existence. It is an inevitable consequence of the development of modern (representative) democracy where the exercise of authority has to be regularised to achieve consistency and equality of all before the law.[11] In other words, because modern democratic principles are antithetical to privileging certain citizens or groups of citizens, it becomes necessary to regularize or standardize the exercise of leadership and government authority by creating a bureaucracy which works according to standard rules and regulations based on standard qualifications for those who exercise such leadership.

But Weber went on to clarify his notion of democracy in modern complex or large associations. He argued that, in any case, the *demos* or the "shapeless mass" never governs modern

associations but is governed by the leaders. What bureaucratization introduces is a change in the way in which executive leaders are selected and the manner in which the masses or interest groups influence the direction of administrative activities by means of public opinion. Thus, in modern complex associations democratisation does not necessarily entail an increasingly active role for the subjects in government.[12]

Weber's theory can be summarised as follows: bureaucratization necessarily accompanies modern mass democracy because of the need to regularise and standardise leadership and government. But modern mass democracy does not necessarily entail greater participation by the masses in the exercise of leadership and the exercise of government authority. What bureaucratization introduces is a change in the manner in which leadership is selected and the way in which the public exercises influence over the leadership.[13] In terms of Weber's theory therefore, trade unions, as modern large-scale and complex organisations which operate on the basis of representative democracy, and seek to regularise their democratic practices and improve their administrative efficiency, are bound to develop bureaucratic tendencies. Hierarchies tend to develop, with decision making powers vested in leaders in terms of seniority and skill. The influence which the members exercise over the bureaucracy through interest groups and 'public opinion' tends to diminish because of the emphasis on specialised training and skill.

From this it can be inferred that bureaucratization does not necessarily entail a diminution of democracy in modern association. Unlike Michels' notion of the oligarchy, Weber's notion of bureaucratization has no negative connotations. What is at issue here is Weber's argument that modern mass democracy limits the influence of the *demos* in direct policy formulation.

The views of Weber and Michels on democracy in societies and organisations are particularly pertinent in the debate which underpins this study. Weber argues that mass democracy is possible in small or homogenous organisations. Similarly, Michels admits that in its infancy, the English labour movement was able to practise mass democracy whereby leaders were required to obtain authorization of all members in resolving disputes with employers and when union financial accounts were open to scrutiny by all members.[14] However, Michels, like

Weber, argues that as organisations grow larger, mass democracy becomes impossible, with leaders assuming an increasingly greater role in directing the affairs of the society or organisation. But their analyses of democracy in complex societies and organisations diverge as outlined above. The relevance of both theories for this study is the shared argument that a direct role in democratic decision-making by the *demos* or the rank-and-file is unattainable. This discussion will be taken up again in the chapters that follow.

The validity of both Weber's and Michels' theories has been disputed by some for their inadequacy in explaining the relationship between leadership and rank and file members in trade unions and other social movements. Michels' theory has continued to evoke scepticism among some social scientists. Hyman (1971) subjected the theory of oligarchy to analysis and came up with three major criticisms of the theory, namely:

a) According to Michels workers have an instrumental orientation to the trade union, seeing it as a service organisation to provide limited economic benefits. But, argues Hyman, the autonomy of the officials to run the union is constrained by the fact that if they fail to deliver the goods, workers are likely to revolt and remove the leadership.[15] This contradicts Michels' assertion that workers' revolts are rare and if they occur they get suppressed.

b) Michels fails to appreciate the prevalence of the assumption that unions ought to operate democratically, which in itself acts as a limit to oligarchic tendencies.[16] This assumption is held mainly by management, sections of the public and the membership.

c) Michels has a monolithic conception of trade union organisation which sees decision-making taking place at the top only. Hyman argues that there are other levels where membership plays an active role in the affairs and decision-making of the union, for example at branch level and on the shop floor.[17]

Clegg (1979) also disagrees with Michels, and argues that while British unions display some features which might lend themselves to oligarchy, it does not necessarily follow that British

unions are oligarchies because there are "other influences at work".[18] He cites two of these as the most important, namely, parties or factions and "the power of workplace organisations in union affairs".[19] Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956) have also argued that secondary organisations, 'union political parties', shopfloor structures and union locals which have independent sources of power from the central union can act as countervailing forces to the emergence of oligarchic tendencies and therefore help maintain democracy.[20] The countervailing factors discussed by Clegg and Lipset, et al are particularly relevant to this study and, as will become clear in the discussion in chapter 3, their arguments are supported by evidence in this research.

As pointed out at the beginning, the central conceptual objective of this study is to examine the extent to which Michels' theory of oligarchy and Weber's theory of bureaucracy are borne out by empirical evidence from the trade unions in South Africa.[21] It is argued here that both theories fall short of capturing the nature and essence of trade union practice in that they tend to give undue attention and attribute exaggerated influence to elected trade union leaders and fail to examine the role of rank and file membership and shop floor representatives in union affairs. In a trade union democracy does not have to take place only at the national level. Unions also have regional, branch, local and shopfloor structures which interact with one another in democratic decision-making. The presence of specialist union officials does not, in itself, have to diminish the democratic participation and policy-making role of union structures.

Michels' theory, in particular, fails to appreciate the dynamic interplay among the various levels and structures of a trade union organisation. He also underestimates the role of countervailing influences, or what Clegg has called "other forces at work", (like the democratic tradition in the independent labour movement which promotes other centres of power, like the factory general meeting, shop stewards' committees, shop stewards' councils and branch committees) which encourage or promote democratic practice in trade unions. Michels also mistakenly equates trade unions with political parties and fails to account for some of the most important differences in form, internal structure and practice between these two kinds of organisation.

In his study of democracy and oligarchy in trade unions Maree (1982) develops a point made by the Webbs at the turn of the century, that worker representatives on the shop floor can become an important counterweight to the emergence of oligarchic tendencies in a trade union. In his analysis of the British trade union movement at various stages of its development Maree also disputes Michels' notion of the 'iron law of oligarchy' and points to the role of shop stewards in autonomous workplace bargaining and their impact on the entire trade union. On this point Maree concludes that,

> The most important development was the incorporation of shop stewards into the union structures. This resulted not only from the unions' desire to restore control over industrial relations they had lost by the 1950s, but also from the power shopfloor representatives had acquired at the workplace. *By impelling themselves onto the various bodies of the unions, shop stewards did much to restore democratic practices in the unions once again.*[22] (Italics added for emphasis)

Maree's argument here reinforces the view that there are countervailing tendencies which make the emergence of trade union oligarchies difficult, if not impossible. However, the weakness of his argument is in his conclusion, based on British trade unions, that tendencies towards democracy and oligarchy are both present in trade unions. While Maree's analysis may be accurate with regard to the British experience of trade unionism which is based on a particular history and course of union development, he does not, however, provide sufficient evidence to prove that this experience is generalizable to trade unions in other countries. In addition, what he means by 'oligarchy' in his conclusion comes far too short of what Michels meant in his analysis. Perhaps a concept Maree should have used is 'bureaucratization' in the Weberian sense to capture the point that such tendencies are not necessarily anti-democratic and they are not irreversible.

A more recent work by Maree (1992) discusses his findings which challenge Michels' theory. One of the shifts in argument in this work is that, unlike the first which argued that there are competing tendencies (oligarchy and democracy) in trade unions, it argues that contrary to Michels' theory, South African trade unions in the 1970s started as oligarchies and ended up as democratic organisations.[23] What remains unclear in this study is whether after what Maree

terms 'the democratisation of the unions'[24], oligarchic tendencies remained in the trade unions or could return as the unions grow.

Although Marie (1992) has pointed to new tendencies in the labour movement (like diminishing internal democracy and the unworkability of worker control of the union) which would seem to support some of Michels' and Weber's arguments, the inability of the rank and file to undertake independent action in defiance against undemocratic practices by the leadership should not be assumed.[25] Chapter 5 of this study examines these issues to establish whether the problems raised by Marie point to new oligarchic or bureaucratic tendencies or not.

PPWAWU, an affiliate of COSATU, was chosen because it has been exposed to participatory management techniques for some time. Given its size and the regional spread of its membership throughout South Africa it can justifiably be termed a complex or large organisation. The union is part of the independent labour movement that emerged in the 1970s and therefore offers opportunities to analyse the form and principles of organisation that were adopted by these unions.[26]

PPWAWU, like all unions which emerged as part of the independent labour movement, has always adopted a combative or militant approach in its engagement with both the employers, who are perceived to operate an exploitative economic system, and the state, which, until recently, was regarded as unrepresentative and therefore illegitimate and undemocratic. Militant abstentionism, adopted by PPWAWU and other unions, is a strategy of refusing to co-operate with employers, employer-initiated structures and the apartheid state and at the same time engaging in militant action to undermine the power of the employers and the state. It is characterised by the use of such weapons as stayaways, boycotts and strikes. This strategy has been a very powerful tool for mobilising workers against employers and the state thereby refusing to lend legitimacy to management and government structures. But the labour movement has always coupled militant abstentionism with a strategy of engagement where the balance of power is believed to be in favour of workers and their unions and where there is potential for winning significant victories for workers. Thus in the late 1970s and the early 1980s many unions decided to register with the government and to seek formal recognition

from employers because this allowed the nascent union movement to get access to further rights for workers, like the right to represent and negotiate on behalf of their members.

However, it is argued in this thesis that as the country enters a new democratic era in politics and civic life, the use of militant abstentionism as a strategy will diminish and unions will move towards greater accommodation and engagement with both the employers and the state. At national level we have begun to see this happening with the involvement of the independent unions in tripartite and statutory bodies like the National Manpower Commission (NMC), the National Economic Forum (NEF) and the National Training Board.[27] This approach could become the precursor of a new industrial relations system in which labour defines its role differently from what it was in the past.[28]

Thus theories of bureaucracy and oligarchy take on a new relevance in South Africa as labour is now participating at a number of levels, from the enterprise to top level forums such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Such participation raises a number of issues, one of which is a concern that engagement in complex issues at these levels of involvement and reliance on experts could lead to the bureaucratisation of unions. It is to this discussion of participation that this Chapter now turns.

3. Worker Participation: A Conceptual Framework

Participatory management in South Africa is still new and most of the studies that have been done are generally introductory. But there is a vast amount of literature available on the experiences of other countries. There are both theoretical and empirical studies of industrial democracy or worker participation programmes in countries like the US, Britain, Germany, Japan, the Scandinavian countries and Yugoslavia. Some of these date back to the 1920s when the 'workers' control' movement in Europe raised hopes about the realisation of industrial democracy.

Throughout this thesis four concepts will be used, often interchangeably, to refer to a set of strategies and visions which have, at different periods in history, found expression in the policies and practices of labour and capital throughout the world, namely participatory management, worker

participation, industrial democracy and workplace democratisation. All of them have one thing in common, that is, that they refer to visions of capital and labour regarding the transformation of capital-labour relations in the labour process. In other words, they imply changes which would seek to narrow the separation between conception and execution in the labour process by opening up some areas in which capital previously had sole control to afford labour a greater degree of participation and involvement. For example, in a typical enterprise run according to F. W. Taylor's scientific management[29] principles management would have the sole right of deciding how individual jobs are done and the content of those jobs. The role of workers would simply be to execute pre-determined tasks. All the above concepts imply a relaxation of that control so that workers could have some autonomy in deciding how to do their jobs. Insofar as the concepts refer to this increased control for the worker in the labour process, they have been used somewhat interchangeably in this thesis.

At the same time, these concepts also differ in meaning in a number of respects as outlined below. However, the distinctions drawn here should always be treated with great caution so as not to lose sight of the aspect on which they overlap. To a certain extent, these are artificial and are only noted here for conceptual clarity because in practice they are often aspects of one strategy which revolves around the point noted above.

1. Worker Participation/Worker Control: This is a strategy which seeks to satisfy a desire or a demand by labour to become involved in decision-making at various levels of an enterprise. It can either be a reformist strategy which does not seek to transform radically the relations of production or part of a radical vision to transform production relations. Conceived of as part of a radical strategy, it implies full control (worker self-management or industrial democracy) by workers. But worker participation should be seen as a continuum which ranges from very limited (pseudo participation) forms to full control where production relations have been totally transformed.[30]

2. Participatory Management: This term is often used interchangeably with 'worker participation', but it differs from it because it refers specifically to *a management strategy* or style which tolerates and even encourages worker participation in decision-making. This strategy is usually introduced by management, either to pre-empt demands by labour or with the specific objective of winning the

co-operation of labour on the shopfloor. In introducing this strategy management often defines the areas and issues on which labour is to participate and, by implication, those in which management retains the prerogative to manage and control. Thus the strategy and the participation which it seeks to introduce for workers are not intended to introduce radical transformation of production relations. As Ramsay has argued, this strategy does not evolve out of the 'humanisation of capital'.[31] Rather it arises because management wants to win the consent of labour to work towards company goals. In introducing participatory management, companies also stress the importance for managers, particularly shopfloor managers, to change their style of managing by delegating some of their powers to lower levels and shopfloor workers. Participatory management accurately describes the processes which were introduced by PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil which are discussed further in this thesis.

3. Industrial Democracy: This term is often used to refer to worker participation in decisions at plant and company level. It therefore encompasses worker participation as discussed above. But industrial democracy also presupposes the prevalence of other democratic practices and rights, like the right of workers to organise collectively and bargain with management. Like worker participation, industrial democracy is a continuum ranging from very superficial forms to full forms.

4. Workplace Democratisation: This term is almost synonymous with industrial democracy. But, in the context of South Africa it also implies other aspects like the removal of discriminatory practices, like those based on gender, race and ethnicity.

The debate on worker participation and control dates back to the turn of the century but its intensity has tended to coincide with the ebbs and flows of worker militancy in different parts of the world. The upsurge of worker militancy during and after the end of World War 1 brought the debate to centre stage as workers posed questions about the managerial prerogative on the shopfloor. The pioneering work of Goodrich (1920), appropriately titled "The Frontier of Control", captured crucial aspects of this debate and noted how workers were pushing back the frontier of control through what he termed "the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not be controlled at all and the demand to take a hand in controlling"[32]. In the Soviet Union many workers

engaged in similar debates at about the same time and factory take-overs presented the new regime with a dilemma as some within the new government were getting concerned that the workers' movement was becoming too radical.[33] The notion of a 'frontier of control' has continued to influence contemporary debates on worker participation and industrial democracy, particularly the school of thought that Cressey and MacInnes call the 'advance of labour' approach.[34]

The end of World War 2 again saw an upswing of worker militancy and, in Germany this resulted in the introduction of early form of works councils which were given rights over some decisions on the shopfloor. According to Schregle the notion of worker participation in Germany was advanced by labour and social democratic parties as far back as the 1920s. This movement put forward a vision of 'industrial democracy' or 'democratisation of the economy' which argued that "democracy must not stop at the factory gate".[35] The works councils, and union rights in general, were a forced compromise to forestall more radical changes which were possibilities generated by worker militancy.[36]

The 1960s and the 1970 were, again, another period of worker militancy and worker control was, once again pushed onto the agenda of shopfloor relations. In Britain this was followed by the appointment of the Bullock Commission which investigated the feasibility of worker participation in decisions.

During all these periods demands by labour for greater participation in company decision-making tended to coincide with phases of worker militancy and assertiveness brought about by increasing hardships facing the working class. One key characteristic of each one of these phases is the breakdown of managerial authority on the shopfloor which threatens to bring about a weakening of managerial control over the labour process. Participatory management, as a management strategy has tended to follow each phase of militancy as an attempt to resolve these contradictions, re-assert managerial control, and give capitalism a new lease of life.

Contemporary debates on worker participation and industrial democracy have tended to be about programmes which seek to advance either the cause of labour or that of capital. There have been those who argue that participatory management undermines labour and holds the danger that

unions could be weakened and incorporated (the 'incorporationist' view), and those that see worker participation as co-operation between capital and labour which offers real opportunities for labour to win significant gains and participation by workers in decision-making at the workplace (the 'advance of labour' view).[37] This dualism seems to mirror that identified by Hyman between what he calls the 'pessimistic' and 'optimistic' traditions in the debate on whether the trade union movement has a revolutionary role or not.[38] Cressey and MacInnes have argued that the 'incorporationist'/'advance of labour' dichotomy is a 'sterile contrast'[39] because it fails grasp the fact that,

> Just as such struggles [at the workplace] are not artificial and 'incorporated', neither are they necessarily 'spontaneously' socialist. They may take either form, and the task before us is surely thus to develop yardsticks for differentiating the two and promoting the latter.[40]

Mathews (1989a) argues for worker participation in the decision-making processes of industry. Although he attempts to present participation as a programme to advance the interests of labour, the objectives of that programme are largely oriented towards re-asserting managerial authority and ensuring the survival of firms. He sees worker participation as a necessity for labour if it is to succeed in facing the challenges of post-Fordism, a mode of organising production based on new concepts like product diversification, flexible specialisation, just-in-time production and greater emphasis on human resource development, all of which are supposed to lead to a re-unification of conception and execution in the labour process.[41] He also seems to argue that there exists a coincidence of interests between capital and labour for the sake of survival of the enterprise and the economy as a whole. He argues that,

> Having liberated ourselves from the mechanical dogmas that saw history as an unfolding piece of clockwork, we now have to face the necessity of constructing a politics of democratisation that is adequate to the emergent post-Fordist era.[42]

Thus for Mathews worker participation becomes a condition for achieving the imperatives of post-Fordism, namely, productivity and competitiveness of the firm. The problem, however, is that while Mathews seems to suggest that workers and unions stand to benefit from worker participation, he fails to discuss the content of worker participation and the implications it

has for workers and unions. Mathews' analysis and his work thus fail to go beyond the 'incorporationist'/'advance of labour' dichotomy discussed above.

But above all, Mathews' argument has two other weaknesses. Firstly, he seeks to de-emphasise class contradictions and attempts to place post-Fordist competitiveness as an imperative that overrides all else. He locates participation outside of the contradiction between the interests of labour and capital and conceives of it as a neutral concept which would benefit both sides equally. His notion of participation leaves no room for struggle and militancy. Secondly, he fails to locate worker participation and worker control in historical perspective and therefore fails to acknowledge that the demand for greater participation in decision-making originates in the working-class and its organisations. The form of participation which Mathews envisages, namely one which is linked to economic imperatives of the firm, has throughout history been proposed by capital during times of high labour militancy.

Ramsay's[43] notion of management programmes of worker participation is useful in that it locates the debate in the context of contradictory class interests of labour and capital and the 'contradictory nature' of the capitalist labour process.[44] In other words he highlights the need for management continually to seek the co-operation of workers in the labour process. Ramsay also gives a historical perspective of the development of worker participation. He argues that participatory management strategies do not evolve out of 'humanization of capital' as is usually claimed, but are cyclical occurrences that correspond to periods when management authority is facing a challenge. They are a compromise by employers to shore up their authority and to ensure the co-operation of labour by attempting to entrench the unitary concept of 'the company' in which all changes must be oriented to efficiency.[45]

4. Worker Participation as Radical Reform

Unlike Mathews, Blumberg (1968) supports participation for totally different reasons. For him participation offers opportunities to address the alienation of the worker from his or her work by reducing the effects of an autocratic organisation on the individual worker. This perspective

challenges, rather than reinforces, the traditional managerial prerogative on the shopfloor. As he explains,

> (W)e do not see participation as a device to lower costs to improve quality, to increase productivity, to undercut trade union or workers' demands, or to give workers the illusion of power without its actuality, the more easily to guarantee jealously guarded managerial prerogatives within the framework of private enterprise. We are interested in the question of participation as it bears on the larger sociological and philosophical issue of the alienation of labour.[46]

Similarly, Salaman (1987) sees participative work organisation as both a means ("a process of management through which organisational/operational changes may be more easily achieved") and an end in itself ("that individuals gain 'some control over how their work is done, how it is developed and organised, and changes that are made to it'").[47] He therefore argues in favour of participation, by advocating an approach that combines task-centred participation (specific to the jobs workers do) on the shop floor with power-centred participation (to do with firm and/or corporate decision-making) at board level and other decision-making structures, and that the approach should not undermine the role of the trade union.[48]

A study by Daniel and MacIntosh (1972) also offers interesting insights. They also advocate worker participation in decision-making and then proceed to discuss the implications for management and trade unions. With regard to unions they look at, among others, the origins of the unions' power to 'obstruct and oppose', tension between shopfloor and higher union structures, participation and plant bargaining, how unions concentrate on wages and leave the issue of industrial democracy to a political party, limitations of union capacities, especially with regard to staffing, training, research, expert back-up, need for security of tenure for shop stewards, and objectives.[49] The value of this work is the fact that it seriously attempts to come to grips with the implications of worker participation for both sides in the labour relationship. The issues raised by Daniel and MacIntosh are particularly relevant to South Africa and will therefore be discussed again in later chapters.

There are also a number of scholars and unionists who, for various reasons, oppose participative management. Clegg's analysis (1960) arrives at the conclusion that none of the experiments in

industrial democracy (joint consultation in Britain and co-determination in Germany) have succeeded in creating industrial democracy.[50] He also challenges the assumption that industrial democracy leads to industrial efficiency or to industrial peace because the contradictory interests of labour and capital cannot be reconciled.[51] Mandel also sees worker participation as a strategy by employers to respond to crises in late capitalism by making workers responsible for decisions while in reality they have no control.[52]

4.1 Worker Participation: The South African Experience

In South Africa studies on participation only began in the 1980s. The impetus for this debate was provided by the country's transition to democracy and the subsequent re-entry of South Africa in the global economy. The country's exposure to global economic trends and debates not only exposed it to new production methods and techniques but it also created a greater awareness among companies of the pressures of globalization and global competition in a world where tariff protection for domestic industry was no longer a viable policy instrument. One of the lessons which South African companies have learnt from this is the need to develop competitive strategies which put a great deal of emphasis on new production methods, like just-in-time and attention to product design, as well as a participatory style of management which allows workers greater autonomy in the labour process and in broader company decisions.

During the 1980s many unions envisaged worker control of production where workers would assume full control of the means of production and of production relations on the shopfloor. Although the call for greater worker control and involvement in decisions on the shopfloor originated in the unions,[53] most unions and unionists have refused to participate in or endorse participatory management because they are suspicious of the intentions of management. In the case of PPWAWU national leadership the reason for this suspicion has been a fear that such schemes would co-opt union shop stewards and shopfloor membership, weaken the national union and frustrate the union's vision for worker control of production.

Thus, up until recently, unions have avoided involvement on this issue and the debate has therefore been vigorously pursued by those outside the labour movement, notably management representatives, management consultants and academics. Many of these contributions have

enthusiastically embraced participatory management and often sought to find ways of making it work in the SA context.[54] Their vision sees participatory management as a means to meet the imperatives of efficiency and global competitiveness, and many argue that by playing a role in some aspects of shopfloor decision-making workers would come to accept co-responsibility for improving productivity and performance.[55] These studies generally tend to ignore the implications of such involvement for the workers, their shop stewards and the union as a whole. Although these studies recognise the role that workers and unions could play in productivity improvement through participation in decision-making, the objective of such participation is defined narrowly. It does not take account of the demand by some in the labour movement (as will become clear in the discussion in chapter 3) for worker participation as a means towards the transformation of power relations in the workplace.

Maller's study (1992) is one of the most innovative of the South African studies in that it does not just advocate involvement, but it also analyses different management approaches and explores the role for the union which takes advantage of capital's 'contradictory needs' in the workplace in a way that benefits workers and does not compromise the union's independence or strength. She also sees participation not as an end in itself but as a means towards transformation of society as a whole.[56]

In South Africa there is very little documented material about the debate against worker participation. However, Nicol (1989) has made a strong case against certain forms of participatory management, particularly employee share ownership schemes (ESOPs), because they undermine unions and collective bargaining over wages.[57]

A new approach to worker participation has emerged within the labour movement. This approach, called 'adversarial participation', has been developed by some American unions, particularly the Bakery, Confectionery, and Tobacco Workers' Union (BC&T)[58] and various other writers linked to the Labour Research Review in the United States[59]. The BC&T approach is,

> (N)ot to participate through some structure of formal 'cooperationism' which supersedes or subsumes the contract....(T)he union would remain first and foremost the advocate of the

> workers interests....Such participation should r . iain within the context of 'the collective bargaining process and the contract'.[60]

The union also argues that it,

> (H)ad never found traditional union structures and formal adversarialism to be an impediment to civilised co-operation with employers where it was warranted and goodwill and good ideas prevailed.[61]

Banks and Metzgar emphasize that participation should proceed on the same premises as collective bargaining where, "Labor is on one side of the table and management, on the other", with each side pursuing its own interests.[62] This strategy, is similar to an approach favoured by some South African trade unionists who seek to extend the collective bargaining agenda rather than draw a separation between pure collective bargaining issues and industrial democracy.[63]

The strength of the 'adversarial participation' thesis is its emphasis on the need for participation to be driven by a strong trade union and the underlying principle that participation should not be used to undermine the union. However, the advocates of this view fail to locate participation within a broader vision of transformation of the power relations in the workplace. In addition, the advocates of this view tend to approach the debate in a way which is essentially reactive in that participation is conceived of only in terms initiatives by the employers. It fails to develop a proactive trade union approach to worker participation.[64]

This thesis has as its point of departure the fact that South Africa has a capitalist economy where the means of production are in the hands of a class of a small minority of owners of capital who also control and manage the production of goods and services in thousands of workplaces across the country. It is the owners and their agents who exercise the legal and actual right to control and manage these workplaces, the so-called managerial prerogative. Millions of producers spend the greater part of their lives working in these workplaces producing a surplus for the owners in return for a wage. Marx's concept of alienation was an attempt to explain the effects of the separation of the producers from the means of production.[65]

The debate on worker participation centres on whether participation is possible under capitalism or whether it is only possible in a socialist system where the separation between the producers and the means of production has ended. There is, however, division of opinion even among those who believe that worker participation under capitalism is possible. As has been shown in this chapter there are those who argue that worker participation under capitalism should concern itself with increasing productivity and enhancing economic growth. There are also those, like Mandel, who argue that worker participation and control is only possible in a socialist system where private ownership of the means of production has been ended. But both arguments are flawed in that they introduce a polarity ... ch fails to address the challenges facing the labour movement.

It would seem that the question which the debate should seek to address is, does a strategy such as worker participation open up opportunities for struggle to advance the vision of the labour movement? If so, how? Blumberg[66] argues that participation opens up space for struggles to alleviate the alienation of labour under an authoritarian form of capitalist control of production. Cressey and MacInnes, and Maller, argue that the labour process has a 'dual character', in that labour is not fully subordinated to capital.[67] According to Cressey and MacInnes, while capital employs labour and has formal ownership of the means of production, capital has to hand over the means of production to workers to produce use values. For production to take place, capital has to seek the co-operation of labour.[68] In this context worker participation, even of the variety usually initiated by management, can open up more space for struggle, and present labour with opportunities to push back the frontier of control on the shopfloor. The crucial aspect here is that participation could offer labour the space to contest management's vision and to present its own alternative vision of the future. That is the main theme that underpins the arguments presented in this thesis.

Thus the goals of labour cannot be achieved by simply invoking the 'incorporationist' or 'advance of labour' arguments because, as Cressey and MacInnes have argued, worker consciousness at the workplace is neither revolutionary nor conservative.[69] Whether or not unions achieve worker participation which meets their objectives depends very much on the contestation, struggle and strategic interventions that the labour movement makes. In their analysis of the role of the labour movement in the transition in South Africa, Adler and Webster (1995) point to the important

strategic role played by labour. Through a strategy of radical reform, a combination of "long-term radical goals of social transformation with reformist strategies and tactics to achieve meaningful victories", unions were able to make a significant impact on the transition process.[70] Using a similar argument Maller asserts that under capitalism participation offers organised workers an opportunity to exploit capital's 'contradictory needs' and could begin to "offer a vision of how work could be organised differently in a transformed society".[71] In other words, while capital seeks to increase its control of labour in the labour process, it simultaneously has to seek the co-operation of labour to produce use values. It is here that labour could find space for struggle, using a reformist strategy of engagement, to fight for a radical vision of transformation.

For some within and outside of the labour movement it is always tempting to see the debate in terms of the incorporation/advance of labour dichotomy. But both approaches have serious limitations as noted above. The notion of radical reform appears to be a more persuasive strategic approach because it offers possibilities for occupying the 'material space for struggle'[72] at the workplace while also leaving room for radical transformative politics. Conceived of as radical reform, worker participation or industrial democracy under capitalism could offer labour opportunities to win meaningful incremental gains for workers which could contribute towards alleviating, if not ending, the alienation of workers under authoritarian forms of capitalist control at the point of production.

5. Conclusion

This thesis is an attempt to fill four gaps in our knowledge with regard to the subject under discussion. Firstly, it explores the theoretical issues raised by Michels and Weber with regard to the sociology of trade unions, and from this develops a framework to analyse union responses to participatory management.

Secondly, it explores the responses and strategies of the union, with emphasis on the role of its structures from the factory floor upwards. Available South African literature on participation has generally paid very little attention to the sociology of trade unionism and the complex relationship

that exists between shopfloor union structures and higher structures, and between membership and leadership, and how this relationship shapes the response of either of these levels to shopfloor, local, regional and national issues.

Thirdly, South African studies of participation have been preoccupied with trying to propose solutions/options to the labour movement without a serious attempt to analyse the implications of such options for shopfloor union structures, a particular union or the labour movement as a whole. This study seeks to explore the possibilities for worker participation which benefits, rather than undermines, workers and their unions.

All the three points referred to above are dealt with in chapter 5 of this study as part of the overall assessment of PPWAWU's response to participatory management.

Finally, this study starts from the premise that a study of a union's response to participatory management needs to take the vision of the labour movement for democratisation of workplaces as the starting point of analysis. In this way, this study has located itself within the concerns of the labour movement. With a few exceptions such as Maller, and Ntshangase and Solomons, most case studies on participatory management in South Africa attempt to accommodate themselves to the initiatives of management, thereby failing to explore and develop the labour movement's own conception of industrial democracy.[73] Evans adopts an uncritical approach to management initiatives at PG Bison, even concluding that "the kind of partnership that is emerging at PG Bison may well be the way forward", while on the other hand chastising "those who believe that class antagonisms should be heightened and that the development of trust between workers and management is dangerous to working class interests".[74] The result is that studies like Evans' ignore completely the fact that the strggle between capital and labour is not only about the appropriation of surplus value, but it is also about control in the labour process. Thus, in South Africa as in other parts of the world, attempts to democratise the workplace by allowing labour more control in the labour process and at plant and company levels originated not from management, but from the labour movement itself. As Moodley has argued, the "trend towards participation must be looked at within the context of increasing trade union pressure for a more democratised workplace - the introduction of these schemes being in essence the subsequent employer response to these calls".[75] Chapter 4 therefore attempts to develop the workers' (and the union's) notion of workplace democratisation.

ENDNOTES:

1. See Friedman, S. (1987) Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970 - 1984, Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 3 - 4; and Baskin, J. (1991) Striking Back: A History of COSATU, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 21 - 22.

2. See for example, Baskin (1991) op. cit., and (1993) Corporatism. "Some obstacles facing the South African labour movement", Centre for Policy Studies, Research Report No. 30, April 1993; Marie, B. (1992), "COSATU Faces Crisis: 'Quick fix' methods and organisational contradictions", SALB, 16,5; Vavi, Z. (1992) "The Name of the Game is Membership", SALB, 16,8; and Keet, D. (1992) "Shop Stewards and Worker Control", SALB, 16,5.

3. For a discussion of the tradition of trade unionism see Hyman, R. (1971) Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism, London: Pluto Press.

4. Michels, R (1959) Political Parties:, New York: Dover, p. 11.

5. ibid., p. 15

6. ibid., p. 205

7. ibid., p. 305

8. ibid., p. 305

9. Giddens, A (1971) Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber, Cambridge: CUP, p. 234

10. Weber, M (1968) Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, New York: Bedminster Press, p. 987

11. ibid., p. 983

12. ibid., p. 984 - 5

13. Schumpeter (1943) also subscribes to this notion and argues that "(D)emocracy does not and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms "people" and "rule". Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule the." In other words, democracy is about "free competition among would-be leaaders for the vote of the electorate". (Schumpeter, J.A. (1943) Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, London: George Allen & Unwin). Bachrach (1969) has termed this the "theory of democratic elitism. (Bachrach, P. (1969) The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique, London: University of London Press).

14. Michels, R, op. cit., p. 28.

15. Hyman, R (1971) op. cit., p. 30.

16. ibid., p. 31 - 33.

17. ibid., p. 32.

18. Clegg, H A (1979) The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain, Oxford: Basis Blackwell, p. 205.

19. ibid., p. 205.

20. Lipset, S.M., Trow, M. and Coleman, J. (1956) Union Democracy: The Inside Politics of the International Typographical Union, New York: The Free Press, p. 69 - 82.

21. The theories of oligarchy and bureaucracy are discussed again in later chapters of this study.

22. Maree, J (1982) "Democracy and Oligarchy in Trade Unions: The Independent Trade Unions in the Transvaal and the Western Province General Workers' Union in the 1970s", Social Dynamics, 8, 1,, p. 45.

23. Maree, J. (1992) "Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy: The Rebirth of African Trade Unions in South Africa in the 1970s", Unpublished manuscript, p. 753.

24. Ibid., p. 754.

25. This point is discussed in chapter 3 particularly with regard to PG Bison where workers dismissed shop floor leaders who were seen to be 'selling out' to management.

26. Background information on PPWAWU is given in chapter 3.

27. Both the National Manpower Commission and the National Economic Forum have now been dissolved into the newly established National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC).

28. The new Labour Relations Act (1995) has forced the pace of these debates within the labour movement. The Act's proposal for the establishment of consensus-seeking workplace forums has forced all trade unions to begin defining a new and different role for themselves in a new industrial relations system.

29. See Taylor, F.W. (1910) Scientific Management, New York and London.

30. For a discussion of worker participation and its forms see Pateman, C. (1970) Participation and Democratic Theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 68 - 69, and Maller, J. (1992) Conflict and Co-operation: Case Studies in Worker Participation, Johannesburg: Raman, p. 10 - 11.

31. Ramsay, H. (1977) "Cycles of Control: Worker Participation in Sociological and Historical Perspective", Sociology, 11, p. 483 - 498.

32. Goodrich, C. L. (1920) The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics, London: G. Bell & Sons, p. 37.

33. McAuley, M. (1977) Politics and the Soviet Union, Harmondsworth: Penguin pp. 44 - 45

and 60 - 64. See also Siriani, C. (1982) Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy, London: NLB.

34. Cressey, P and MacInnes, J (1980) "Voting for Ford: Industrial Democracy and the Control of Labour", Capital & Class, 11, Summer 1980, p. 6.

35. Schregle, J. (1986) "The German Model of Institutionalised Workers' Participation in the International Context of Workers' Participation", paper to the 7th World Congress of the International Industrial Relations Association, Hamburg, 1 - 4 September 1986, p. 177.

36. ibid., p. 177.

37. ibid., p. 6.

38. see Hyman, R. (1971) op. cit.

39. ibid., p. 6.

40. ibid., p. 20.

41. Mathews, J (1989a) Age of Democracy: The Politics of Post-Fordism, Melbourne: OUP, p. 74. See also, Mathews, J. (1989b) Tools of Change: New Technology and Democratisation of Work, Sydney: Pluto Press, Chapter 3.

42. ibid., p. 74.

43. Ramsay, H. (1977) "Cycles of Control: Worker Participation in Sociological and Historical Perspective", Sociology, 11, September 1977.

44. Maller, J. (1992), op. cit., p. 159.

45. Ramsay, H. (1977) op. cit., p. 483 -98.

46. Blumberg, P. (1968) Industrial Democracy, The Sociology of Participation, Constable, p. 328.

47 Salaman, M. (1987) Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. 309.

48. ibid., p. 321.

49. See Daniel, W.W. and MacIntosh, N. (1972) The Right to Manage?: A Study of Leadership and Reform in Employee Relations, London: MacDonald.

50. Clegg, H.A. (1960) A New Approach to Industrial Democracy, Oxford: Basis Blackwell, pp. 91 and 95.

51. ibid., p. 84 - 85.

52. Mandel, E. (1973) "The Debate on Workers' Control", in Hunnius, G., Garson G.D. and Case, J. (eds) Workers' Control: A Reader on Labor and Social Change, New York: Vintage Books, p. 352.

53. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, PPWAWU head office, 24 November 1994.

54. See for example, Anstey, M. (ed.) (1990) Worker Participation: Concepts and Issues, Kenwyn: Juta; Maree, J. (1991) "Worker Participation: A Case for Co-determination", Indicator SA, 8, 4, Spring 1991; Evans, G. (1992) "Worker Participation at PG Bison", in SA Labour Bulletin, 16, 3.

55. Maree, J. (1991) "Worker Participation: A Case for Co-determination", Indicator SA, 8, 4, Spring 1991, p. 85.

56. Maller, J (1992) op. cit., p. 159.

57. Nicol, M. (1989) "Promoting Participation in ESOPs?", SA Labour Bulletin, 13, 8, February 1989, p. 99.

58. Scannell, R.F. (1992) "Adversary Participation in the Brave New Workplace: Technological Change and the Bakery, Confectionery, and Tobacco Workers' Union", in Adler, G. and Suarez, D. (eds) (1992) Union Voices: Labor's Response to Crisis, New York: State University of New York Press.

59. Banks, A. and Metzgar, J. (1989) "Participating in Management: Union Organising on a New Terrain", Labor Research Review, 14.

60. Scannell, R. F. (1992) op. cit., p. 108.

61. ibid., p. 110.

62. Banks, A. and Metzgar, J. (1989) op. cit., p. 24.

63. See for example, Ntshangase, W. and Solomons, A. (1993) "Adversarial Participation: A Union Response to Participatory Management", in SA Labour Bulletin, 17, 4.

64. An example of this is the way Ntshangase and Solomons posed the key questions facing the union movement - obstruct, let it happen or become centrally involved. The assumption here is that all initiatives will come from management and all the union has to do is react or respond to these initiatives.

65. For a discussion of the concept of alienation see Marx, K. (1978) "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", in Tucker, R.C. (ed.) (1978) The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd edition, New York: W.W.Norton and Co., p. 70 - 81.

66. See Blumberg, P. (1968) op. cit.

67. Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980) op. cit. p.14, and Maller (1992) op. cit. p. 5.

68. ibid., p. 14.

69. Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980), op. cit.

70. Adler, G. and Webster, E. (1995) "Challenging Transition Theory: The Labour Movement, Radical Reform and Transition To Democracy in South Africa", Politics and Society, 23, 1, p. 91.

71. Maller, J. (1992) op. cit., p. 159.

72. This is a term used is used by Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980) op. cit., p. 20, to refer to the opportunities for struggles which can lead to real gains for workers provided there are subjective interventions by the labour movement to promote that struggle.

73. See for example Evans, G. (1992) "Worker Participation at PG Bison", SALB, 16, 3.

74. ibid., p. 51.

75. Moodley, S. (1993) "Worker Participation in Industry", Paper presented at the ASSA/SASOV merger conference, January 1993, p. 6.

CHAPTER 2:
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

1. Introduction

The research for this study was undertaken from the middle of 1993 up to April 1994. Since the union is the main subject of analysis research was carried out among PPWAWU members, shop stewards, full-time officials and elected leaders of the union. However, some management representatives in the factories covered in this study (Nampak Polyfoil and PG Bison) were also interviewed for background information on the change processes introduced by those companies and on union-management relations at that level. I also benefitted from my active involvement in studies carried out by the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) at the two companies at around the same time.

This study is, to a large extent, a consequence on my previous work in PPWAWU. Thus the choice of the union was influenced by my involvement in debates about how the union should respond to new management initiatives on the shopfloor. PG Bison was one of the first companies in the entire country to initiate a workplace change process at a time when co-operative workplace relations and worker involvement in decisions were unheard of in South Africa. Nampak, which at some stage was notorious in union circles for its 'union bashing' practices soon followed PG Bison by introducing 'change processes' at selected plants. Thus it was logical for me to trace the evolution of union policy towards these schemes by looking at the union's response to what these two companies had initiated.

The two plants which were chosen for investigation, namely PG Bison (Piet Retief) and Nampak Polyfoil (Nancefield), were selected purposively based on my prior knowledge of them and after further consultation with, and advice from union and management representatives. The focus of this study is to understand the response of the union and its membership in these two factories to the change processes initiated by management. They were chosen more for their differences rather than their similarities, and a number of factors, namely, geographical location, union organisation, race and gender composition of

69. Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980), op. cit.

70. Adler, G. and Webster, E. (1995) "Challenging Transition Theory: The Labour Movement, Radical Reform and Transition To Democracy in South Africa", Politics and Society, 23, 1, p. 91.

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the workforce and levels of education, influenced the choice. I was interested in studying the response of union members in two factories which had different histories and experiences and which were located in different parts of the then-Transvaal province. Nampak Polyfoil is based in an urban industrial area in Johannesburg while PG Bison is based in rural Piet Retief. The choice was also based on the fact that PG Bison had weak union organisation, had a predominantly African and male workforce with relatively low levels of education. Nampak Polyfoil, on the other hand, had strong union organisation, had racially mixed workforce with a reasonably high proportion of women, had relatively better levels of education and a highly politicised workforce.

This chapter seeks to highlight issues relating to the methodology adopted as well as some of the insights gained during the course of the research. These are relevant not only for assessing the validity of the conclusions made in this study but also because they highlight key questions for consideration by researchers looking at similar issues in South Africa.

2. Gaining Access

Before I carried out the field-work I approached the union head office and the head offices of the two companies to arrange access. The request to the union was for access to their members, access to information and documentation on the subject, permission to attend and observe in union meetings and conferences and for other forms of assistance. This the union readily agreed to and they in turn asked to have access to the final results of the research. The fact that I had worked for the union and the fact that I had left it to study greatly facilitated the speedy and positive reply to my request. The general secretary tabled my letter at a meeting of the National Office-bearers Committee (NOBC) and all other structures were simply informed that the office-bearers had no problem with my project and that I should be assisted with everything I asked for. When I approached union shop stewards at the two factories I simply sent a letter to which I attached the interview schedule and the general secretary's letter agreeing to grant me access.

However, mine was an exceptional case because normally it would have taken much longer

for a researcher to gain such acceptance and endorsement from a union. Adler (1990) points to some of the difficulties a researcher experiences in trying to do research among black workers in South Africa. In his case it took nine months before the national union head office agreed to grant him access and another five months before the local branch agreed to work with him.[1] Although the situation has changed somewhat from the time Adler conducted his research it is still difficult to get a union's permission to conduct research among its members as unions remain suspicious of the motivations and intentions of researchers except in cases where such researchers have been commissioned by the unions themselves.

The request I made to management of the two companies was for permission to do the research in the factories and during working hours. This included a request to do a tour of the factory to familiarise myself with the production processes and other aspects of the factories which were not immediately clear to me. In the case of Nampak Polyfoil I also asked for permission to interview senior management on a number of issues relating to the change process. PG Bison head office agreed to the research without any problems despite their concern that Piet Retief was not the best factory to enable me to gain a good picture of how workers were responding to the change process. However, I later convinced them that my involvement in the SWOP investigation would allow me to gain a much broader picture of the company's position.

Nampak head office management also agreed in principle to grant me access provided management at the plant was prepared to accept me. Indeed when Nampak Polyfoil management raised concerns a head office manager accompanied me to a meeting with the plant management to discuss his concerns. After this meeting Polyfoil management agreed to assist me and to grant the access.

3. Research Methods

Data for this study was gathered by means of four methods which are commonly used in

Polyfoil the General Manager, the Operations Manager and the Continuous Improvement Manager were interviewed. However, at PG Bison such interviews were not done for this study. But I was able to draw on interviews done earlier during a SWOP/PPWAWU study at the company in which I was involved (see under 'Observation' below).

All the interviews were recorded on tape and hand notes taken. The tapes were later transcribed and form a significant part of the research material used in this study.

3.2 Union Members' Survey at Selected Factories

A randomly selected sample of union members was drawn from each of the two factories purposively chosen for the study (Nampak Polyfoil, Nancefield and PG Bison, Piet Retief). In each case the sample was 10 percent of the workforce. The names were randomly drawn from an existing computer list of employees which follows the order of the employees' clock numbers (employee numbers). The lists themselves were random in the sense that they were neither in alphabetical order nor did they follow the race, gender or the date on which a worker was employed. From these lists the sample was them drawn by picking the first name on the list and thereafter every tenth worker until the end of the list. If a worker chosen happened to be away (for example, on leave or sick) his/her name was replaced by the next name on the list. In drawing the sample care was also taken to ensure that all age groups, men and women and all departments were represented.

The instrument used to gather data from this sample was a structured questionnaire (see APPENDIX 1) which had been piloted with workers of both PPWAWU and the South African Railways and Harbours Union (SARHWU) in Johannesburg. The questionnaire was made up of five sections, each with about ten questions. The sections dealt with the personal particulars of the interviewee, his/her work, the union, worker participation and his/her attitude and response to worker participation.

The population which the survey sought to cover was that part of the workforce which was organised by PPWAWU and in both cases the union had organised the majority of workers within its bargaining unit.[6] Nampak Polyfoil had 270 weekly paid workers, 217 of whom

were union members. PG Bison had about 600 employees, 410 of whom were weekly paid workers. Thus a 10 percent random sample was selected which consisted of 31 workers at Polyfoil and 41 at PG Bison. It should be noted that although the sample was drawn as a percentage of the entire shopfloor workforce, the choice of the 10 percent was made from a slightly smaller population of trade union members only. The intention of the study was to isolate and only study workers unionised under PPWAWU. In choosing the sample a number of variables were prioritised. Thus the sample was stratified according to skill, education, gender, service, seniority, age, and rural/urban divisions. The intention of this stratification was to establish whether there is any correlation between any of these variables and unionised workers' attitudes or responses to participatory management.

I personally administered all the questionnaires in both factories. In each case it took a week to administer all the questionnaires to the selected sample of workers. From the onset the intention was to avoid using research assistants. This approach proved particularly useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the research was conducted at a time when the atmosphere in both factories was tense following the workers' rejection of the change processes. The workers were generally hostile to anything and any discussion that had something to do with TPQ or the change process and any outsider doing research on these matters was therefore viewed with similar suspicion. Thus my approach of administering the questionnaires in a face-to-face setting enabled me to smooth access to each respondent and to respond on the spot to questions and some fears about the research that some respondent had. For example, on the first day at Polyfoil I administered questionnaires without any hitches. But on arrival on the second day I was informed by the shop stewards that workers were refusing to go on with the process because they thought the research had been commissioned by management as part of the change process. As a result I had to spend the first two hours explaining to both workers and shop stewards that the research was independent and that the responses were to be used for an academic study at the University of the Witwatersrand. I backed these explanations up by producing correspondence between myself and the union's general secretary at the time which indicated that I had left the union to undertake studies at the university and that the project had the support of the union. It was only after these explanations and when the workers had

satisfied themselves that I was not a management researcher that they agreed to allow me to carry on with the process.

The above point is consistent with an observation made later in this study, namely, that union members on the shopfloor have the power to take independent positions and decisions, particularly on shopfloor issues, based on their own assessment of whether a decision is going to benefit or harm them. This means that they are not just passive recipients of decisions and directives from the union leadership.

Secondly, my direct involvement in administering the questionnaires enabled me to communicate with workers in their own languages, mainly Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans and Sotho. The questions were read out in English and then translated into the respondent's own language to ensure that he/she understood them. The same process happened with the responses. The respondent would respond in his/her language, the response would be translated into, and recorded in English and the translation would then be checked with the respondent for accuracy.

Thirdly, as the researcher not only did I understand the nuances of the questions I was putting to respondents, but I was also able to pick up nuances in the responses I was getting. In cases where a respondent wanted to elaborate further on a response I allowed him/her to do so and then recorded such explanations at the back of the questionnaire with the number of the question recorded next to the explanation. In a number of cases these elaborations proved much more useful than the answers provided for in the questionnaire. An example of this is a respondent at PG Bison who in response to the question, "Do you think the workplace is being run democratically?", answered "No". After a brief pause he went on to explain, "I do not believe that a factory should be run democratically. Only the person who puts down the capital should run the factory".

The coded questionnaires were entered and then analyzed on SPSS. Although the survey yielded very important information for this study, it was not intended to be a central method of the investigation. It was intended as a supplementary method to obtain statistical

information which would allow me to make some generalisations regarding the profile of the workforces at the factories and to use some of the correlations for analysis.

3.3 Observation

A third method used to collect data for this study is what I would term 'observation'. Stacey (1969) draws a distinction between participant observation where the observer "shares as fully as possible the life of those he is observing", and 'non-participant observation' where the observer is "simply present as direct observer of events".[7] The observation used in this study was the latter but I also drew a lot from my knowledge of the union as a former full-time official when I shared fully the life of the unionists I was observing. I also enjoyed almost unlimited access to information and people in the union. This access dates back to the years I was employed by the union as a full-time official from the mid-1980s to early 1992. During this time a high degree of trust developed between myself and a number of union leaders and workers I met in the course of my duties in the union. When I left the union this trust continued to exist and I continued to enjoy the privilege of having access to the union because many in the union believed I had a good understanding of the issues facing the union and sympathy for some of the views they hold on a number of issues. Thus unlike the social scientist who hides his or her identity in order to become a participant observer, my identity was fully known to the union but I was able to sit and observe in many union meetings, and even union/management negotiations on participatory management, without affecting the behaviour of union members and representatives (see also the section on Bias and Objectivity below).

The above raises another aspect of the observation I have been engaged in during the course of the research I undertook. In 1993 PPWAWU approached the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand to which I have been attached as a full-time researcher and later as an associate researcher to assist it in investigating whether or not PG Bison management had valid grounds for retrenching a total of 1 000 workers, the majority of them PPWAWU members. A similar request was made in 1994 to do a much broader study in the Nampak group. In both cases I was part of the SWOP teams and, although the two investigations were separate from my own research, my involvement

was part of a very conscious decision to observe union behaviour, actions and responses to participatory management at the two companies with a view to gaining insights for this study. During these investigations I sat in union meetings, workshops, union 'caucus' meetings before or during negotiations and in union-management negotiations. In both cases questions discussed with workers during factory visits (four at PG Bison and eight at Nampak) included issues of worker participation and workers' views on the subject. Throughout the investigations my identity as a researcher observing union response to participatory management was unknown to or forgotten by most workers and union leaders. To many of the workers and leaders the role that they identified me with was that of a SWOP researcher who was part of a team commissioned to assist the union to grapple with urgent issues that the union was facing at the time.

Before the interviews and the survey were conducted a factory tour was done in each of the two factories so as to get a better understanding of the work processes, the products, the various jobs that workers do and other work-related issues pertaining to the research. In both cases access to the factory floor was unrestricted for the duration of the research. Similar factory tours and discussions with workers at their work stations were conducted during the SWOP studies mentioned above at both factories as well as in other similar factories of the two companies.

Thus the observation which has been undertaken for the purpose of this study defies the conventional definition of participant observation and yet it proved to be the most valuable method of observing union practices and processes as it tried to grapple with the issue of participatory management in the two companies. In addition to the usual research methods outlined above, this study has also benefitted from observation through my past involvement in and current association with the union and from the work that I have been involved in on behalf of SWOP.

3.4 Primary Union and Company Documents

One of the benefits of the approach outline in 1.3 above has been the access it has given me to key primary sources of information from both the union and the company in the form of

minutes of meetings, reports, internal memoranda and other documentation on the subject of participation. Some of these documents reveal the complexities involved in the subject, how the parties are grappling with these and how the approaches of both the union and the two companies have changed over time. Material from these sources has been drawn on widely in this study, particularly in chapter 3. It has been used in the form of direct quotes, as a general reference and to construct tables. Some of these sources were of a general nature, like the union constitution, company reports, employee records from the factory, union membership records, etc, while others were specifically related to the subject of this study, like surveys, union minutes, minutes of union-management meetings, etc. Where these sources are directly drawn on in this study they have been appropriately referenced and acknowledged. Finally, the bibliography includes all the main primary sources used throughout this study.

4. Understanding Trade Union Response to Participation: Some Methodological Issues

The foregoing discussion raises a number of issues with regard to the methodology relevant for the study of trade union strategies and action in South Africa. These lessons are particularly important for academic research given the distance that has existed historically between academic researchers and trade unions in South Africa. Many unions and trade unionists remain very suspicious of academic researchers and therefore tend to either shun them or to give them as little information as possible.

4.1 Trade Union Practice, Action and Governance

Although many studies of trade unions in South Africa acknowledge the crucial role played by rank and file union members in trade union practice, action and governance, many studies still suffer from the weakness of presenting the views of a particular layer of the union as 'the views of the union'. It is very seldom that a distinction is drawn between the views of union members (workers and shop stewards on the factory floor), full-time officials and elected leaders at branch/regional and national levels of the union. It is argued

here that the views and opinions of national leaders of the unions do not necessarily reflect the views of the rank and file, and this can be said of the other layers of a union's leadership too. Indeed chapter 3 in this study shows that the views of union members and those of the leadership can be at odds on an issue such as participation. This is the experience of PPWAWU, particularly at PG Bison.

It is the contention of this study that an experience such as the PG Bison one calls for a research methodology which not only recognises that union members may hold views which are different to those of the national leadership, but also stratifies the union in order to get the views of each layer of the union before such a study can make generalisations about 'the union'. Another similar misconception is the common reference to a 'strong union' and a 'weak union'. This approach is crucial for the validity of research on trade union practice, action and governance.

4.2 Data Gathering Methods

In the light of the above, the selection of data gathering methods becomes a very important decision for the researcher. Shopfloor union members (and shopfloor workers in general) are not intellectually inclined and my experience was that they often take their experiences for granted and therefore find it hard to analyze their actions and experiences. The questionnaire proved to be the most useful instrument to elicit their views on these experiences. However, the questionnaire should make provision for 'elaboration' of answers whenever possible as these can yield a lot of useful and additional information.

On the other hand, the unstructured qualitative interview is most ideal for shop stewards, union officials and other union leaders as it allows them to reflect on and give perspective to the broader situation that they have to contend with as leaders. These are the intellectuals of the trade union movement and they are used to intellectual debates and discussions in their day-to-day work. The fact that PPWAWU had not developed a policy at the time the research was done proved an advantage in the interviews because each respondent felt free to reflect on the issue of participation and give individual opinions (or the views of their factory shop stewards committee) without being restricted by trying to interpret a union

policy.

Finally, the question of validity of results and whether these can be generalised to other similar cases is a[illegible] an important consideration in social research. This work is being presented as a union case study, and case studies are often used to make generalisations to other cases which are similar or the same to the one being examined. Obviously there are many aspects of this study which can be generalised to other unions operating in other companies in South Africa. However, the objective of the study is not to achieve statistical generalisability but rather to study the subject for its analytical relevance in understanding trade union response to the dynamics of a changing workplace.

4.3 Bias and Objectivity

Objectivity and bias are elusive concepts in social research. While it is desirable to achieve as much objectivity as possible in the researcher's interpretation of social reality it is very difficult to eliminate bias completely. I worked for the same union which is the subject of this study for a number of years and to a certain extent I had been part of the debates explored in this study. For this reason the extent to which I could be objective or biased in my treatment of the subject is a pertinent issue which warrants some discussion here.

A degree of bias is inevitable in the researcher's endeavour to understand and interpret social reality. Indeed bias is embedded in the values and ideologies of social actors and society from which we as researchers come. In this sense no researcher can claim to be fully detached or neutral in the way he or she approaches a research project.[8] My interest in the subject of this study, the research question I posed, the methods I adopted to investigate the issues, the questions I put to my respondents and the conclusions I derived from my research were to a large extent informed by certain values and ideological positions which I hold. I went into the research with a particular bias based by my sympathy and solidarity with labour movement and the struggle for better conditions for workers.

Marks' (1993) research among youth in Diepkloof notes that allegiance by a researcher to a

social movement which is simultaneously the subject of research may have advantages which outweigh the costs. She argues that without being identified as 'someone from within' (a 'comrade' and a member of the ANC Youth League) would have rendered her research task impossible. She goes on to observe,

> It should be noted that while in one sense I was and 'insider', I remained an outsider to the research setting. This allowed for the necessary distance to be able to be both reflective and critical.[9]

However, the foregoing discussion is not intended to diminish the need and importance of achieving objectivity in social research. On the contrary, it seeks to clarify our understanding of objectivity by challenging conventional notions of objectivity which seek to achieve neutrality and value freedom while neglecting to confront the ideological origins of research. The argument which informed the approach to this research is that research is necessarily biased in terms of the ideological position and values of the researcher, but it is imperative that the way researchers account for social actions and social reality must be accurate. In other words, the way researchers gain knowledge of, and account for, social actions and social reality must be an accurate reflection of those social actions and such social reality. As Jary and Jary aptly put it,

> (S)ocial reality does not exist independently of our collective conceptions of it. However, it can be seen as existing independently of any individual conceptions of it and to this degree as existing 'objectivity'. Thus there seems no reason why social science should not aspire to 'objectivity', ...always accepting that this must include 'objective' accounts of what social actors hold 'subjectively' in constituting and reproducing their social worlds. That objective accounts may be difficult to achieve, must be recognized.[10]

Becker (1970) provides useful insights on what researchers can do to avoid bias which distorts the results of their research. In a chapter which begins by asking the question, "Whose side are we on?", Becker asserts that it is not possible to do research that is uncontaminated by personal sympathies and values. He then proposes a solution which is based on the argument that,

> Whatever side we are on, we must use our techniques impartially enough that a belief to which we are especially sympathetic could be proved untrue. We must always inspect our work carefully enough to know whether our techniques and theories are open enough to allow that possibility.[11]

One of the key techniques which has been used in this study is to allow for this possibility and enhance subjects' own subjective 'voices' to explain their actions, attitudes, hopes, aspirations, concerns and fears and to interpret their own actions as they go about 'constituting and reproducing' social reality.

This research was informed by the belief that objectivity in social research has to do with the (objective) methods employed to elicit subjective views of subjects as they constitute and reproduce social reality. In this the task of the researcher is to develop broader accounts and analyses which seek to explain why people act as they do.

Earlier in this chapter it was indicated that the research was conducted at a time of high tension at both factories when the workers had just rejected the change processes. A question which arises here is, to what extent does this tension skew the results of the research? In other words, would the results be different if these was no tension? The answer to these questions is that in most South African workplaces tension and mistrust is the norm rather than the exception. The brief phase of 'co-operation' which both factories experienced was the exception. The anger and sense of betrayal which the workers felt at the time of the suspension simply re-inforced their long-held mistrust of management. However, it would seem that this anger is no worse than what the workers felt before the introduction of these processes. Indeed some of the result of the workers' survey show a positive attitude towards management, particularly at Nampak Polyfoil. For example, 52% of Nampak Polyfoil workers agreed that since the introduction of the change process the attitude of management towards workers had improved, and 61% said that workers were being treated better than before. Thus the extent to which high tension and anger skewed the results of the research would seem to be minimal.

4.4 Ethical Issues

When I approached the union and management to do the research for this study I made a commitment to act in a professional manner and to respect confidentiality and anonymity on any issues they specified to me. Although the general context in which the research was conducted differed from what Adler (1990) and Marks (1993) describe[12], in the sense that in my case there was very little fear by unionists of reprisals resulting from talking to a researcher, the workplace remains an arena of conflict, power struggle and mistrust between labour and capital. It is a terrain which the researcher must tread very carefully in order to avoid playing into the hands of either side and thus getting embroiled in the conflict.

The following are the key ethical considerations and steps which enabled me to avoid being drawn into the politics of the workplace:

a) All the survey questionnaires administered to the worker sample were anonymous. This helped reassure the respondents that no reprisals would follow from answering questions or revealing information to me. Each interview was prefaced by an explanation of how the sample had been selected and how the workers' names had been randomly drawn from the company's employment records.

However, the in-depth interviews with shop stewards and union officials were done openly and they had no problem with their identities being revealed. Part of the reason for this is that the views they were expressing on issues were common-knowledge in the workplace and in the union as they had been debated openly with both management and their colleagues. The management interviews were treated in a similar way as those of shop stewards and union officials.

b) All informants were assured that the information was to be used for academic research and publication purposes only and that the information would under no circumstances be passed on to anyone in the union or management.

c) In addition to giving guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, I also made a commitment to both the union and management that I would not become involved or interfere in the politics of the workplace. The importance of this approach was highlighted to me during an interview with a shop steward at Nampak Polyfoil. At the end of the interview I asked him whether there was anything else he wanted to raise which my questions had not raised. He said there was nothing he wanted to add but, he went on to ask, "What do you think of this change process? Do you think our approach is correct?" Apart from the fact that the question was tricky, trying to answer it would have been a very dangerous thing to do because my response could have been used by one of the parties to justify their own point of view. In other words, there was no way I could offer advice and opinions on the change process without affecting the responses and behaviour of the subjects of the research. I therefore told him that I was still trying to understand the subject and that I could only venture an opinion after I had completed the research. I further repeated an offer I had made to the union that if, at the end of the research, the union and management invited me to make a presentation of the findings I would be too happy to do so. My response to the question was not just a diplomatic way of avoiding the question. More importantly, it was an attempt to inform the shop steward that my opinions would result from an analysis of their own views on the subject.

ENDNOTES:

1. Adler, G. (1990) "The Politics of Research during a Liberation Struggle: Interviewing Black Workers in South Africa", in Grele, J.G. (ed.) (1990) International Annual of Oral History, 1990, New York: Greenwood Press, p. 236.

2. Stacey, M. (1969) Methods of Social Research, Oxford: Pergamon Press, p. 75.

3. Burgess, R.G. (1982) "The Unstructured Interview as a Conversation", in Burgess, R. G. (ed.) (1982) Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 107.

4. Goode, W.J. and Hatt, P.K. (1952) Methods in Social Research, Tokyo: McGraw-Hill, p. 187.

5. The officials were, a former general secretary, an assistant general secretary, a national education officer, a national organiser and a local organiser.

6. The bargaining unit, or that portion of the workforce which is eligible for membership of and representation by PPWAWU, covered all weekly-paid workers in Peromnes grades 1 to 19. In both factories this translated into all categories of weekly-paid workers below the level of supervisor.

7. Stacey, M. (1969) op. cit., p. 63.

8. For a detailed discussion of bias, objectivity and value-freedom in sociology see also Gouldner, A.W. (1973) For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Silverman, D. (1985) Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: Describing the Social World, Hants: Gower; Denzin, N.K. (1970) Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook, London: Butterworths; Horowitz, I.L. (1968) Professing Sociology: Studies in the Life Cycle of Social Science, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company; Becker, H.S. (1970) Sociological Work: Method and Substance, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company; Stacey, M. (1969) op. cit., pp. 2 - 7.

9. Marks, M. (1993) Organisation, Identity and Violence Amongst Activist Diepkloof Youth, 1984 - 1993, MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 27.

10. Jary, D. and Jary, J. (1991) Collins Dictionary of Sociology, Glasgow: Harper Collins, p. 437.

11 Becker, H.S. (1970) Sociological Work: Method and Substance, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, p. 133.

12. See Adler, G. (1990) op. cit.; and Marks, M. (1993) op. cit.

CHAPTER 3:

A TALE OF TWO FACTORIES: PPWAWU MEMBERS' RESPONSE TO PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

1. Introduction

This chapter is about two factories in the packaging and wood industries. One is based in metropolitan Johannesburg, Gauteng, while the other is based in rural Piet Retief in the Mpumalanga province. At first it may seem that everything about these two factories is different. One operates in the plastic packaging industry producing retail plastic carrier bags while the other is in the wood industry manufacturing particle board to supply the furniture manufacturing industry. The technologies used in the two factories are different and so are the raw materials. Even the places where the two are located are different. Johannesburg is South Africa's industrial powerhouse and the country's largest city while Piet Retief is a small rural town whose main economic activities are farming and forestry. There are thousands of factories in Johannesburg employing millions of people while Piet Retief has two main factories (PG Bison and Mondi Board Mills) which together employ less than a thousand workers.

But there is a lot that the two factories have in common. They both have workers and managers, and use sophisticated machinery to produce goods for the local and international markets. Both factories, like thousands of other factories throughout South Africa, operate according to capitalist principles with the objective of making profit for their owners. They employ workers who sell their labour power in return for a wage. The owners of the two factories also have similar problems and aspirations.

Since the late 1980s South Africa has been going through a process of rapid transformation, particularly in the political and economic spheres. This process has swept through the entire country from remote villages and towns like Piet Retief to metropolitan centres like Johannesburg. On the economic front one of the features of the transformation is the change in

the strategies that management use to run the workplace. In this regard both factories, and the companies which own them, have pioneered workplace change processes to reposition themselves in rapidly changing national and international markets. An important feature of these change processes is the notion of worker participation in decision-making whose objective is to win the co-operation of the workforce in achieving company economic objectives.

This chapter analyzes the response of the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) and its members at the two factories to participatory management, a new strategy which management has introduced in many South African workplaces since the late 1980s. The union was chosen because it has been exposed to participatory management strategies for some time. It is part of the independent labour movement that emerged in the 1970s and therefore offers opportunities to analyze the form and principles of organisation that were adopted by these unions as well as the strategies adopted by the independent unions in response to new management techniques from the late 1980s onwards. The investigation sought to understand whether a union's organisational strength on the shopfloor was an important factor influencing the way a union responds to change processes. Nampak Polyfoil has been one of PPWAWU's most militant factories on the Witwatersrand and has participated in all major campaigns of the union and COSATU. PG Bison, on the other hand, has always had very weak union structures and union members have played a marginal role in union campaigns.

The origins and the way in which the two change processes were introduced are different. At Polyfoil management started the change process because of pressures from the workers. They realised that they were facing competitive pressures in their environment but could not meet these challenges without making some concessions in order to win the co-operation of the workforce. Thus the need for the change process originated from within the conditions of the factory itself. On the other hand, the PG Bison strategy was a strategy from above. From the beginning it was a head office project to deal with what were perceived to threats in the broader environment. In other words, there were no immediate pressures faced by Piet Retief management that led to the introduction of the change process in that factory.

Finally, the change processes were different forms of strategic interventions by management at the two plants. The PG Bison process was a more pro-active intervention by management before the transition to democracy got under way in 1990 while the Polyfoil process was a more of a crisis management intervention in the face of workforce militancy during the transition.

2. PPWAWU: A Brief History

The union was formed in 1974 as the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PWAWU). It started off very small and took a long time to make serious inroads into the sectors it organises because of the stranglehold of the closed shop unions (printing and furniture)[1] and anti-union employers, particularly in forestry and sawmilling. For many of its early years it was confined to the paper mills in northern and southern Natal, the eastern Transvaal and the Witwatersrand regions.[2] It made its first real membership gains in printing, paper packaging and woodworking towards the mid-1980s, and only managed to get a foothold in furniture, forestry and sawmilling in the late 1980s.

In 1979 PWAWU joined forces with a few other unions to form the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). During all this time its membership remained small and its impact inside FOSATU negligible. When the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed in 1985 PWAWU became the major union in the paper, printing and wood industry as defined in the federation's constitution. In terms of COSATU policy two or more unions in an industry were required to merge in order to achieve the principle of "one industry, one union". In terms of COSATU policy the union's 'industry' is very broad, covering workers in the pulp, paper, printing, paper packaging, wood, furniture, forestry and allied industries. Thus in October 1987 PWAWU and a smaller printing union, the National Union of Printing and Allied Workers (NUPAWO) merged to form the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU). At the time of the merger PWAWU had about 22 000 members and NUPAWO about 1 900 members. PWAWU came from what Fine and Webster (1989) have termed the 'shop floor' tradition of trade unionism. On the other hand NUPAWO, which was formed in 1984 as an industrial off-shoot of South African Allied

Workers' Union (SAAWU), emerged from the 'national democratic' tradition of trade unionism and was an affiliate of the United Democratic Front (UDF). But to all intents and purposes, NUPAWO was absorbed by PWAWU. It was numerically and organisationally very weak - only 2 000 members as opposed to PWAWU's 22 000 members - and had weak structures from the shopfloor upwards. For these reasons it did not make any real impact on the new union. This was more so because by the time of the merger in October 1987, "tactical, strategic and theoretical differences" between the above traditions had begun to narrow[3] and there was a genera acceptance within the independent labour movement of the need to combine strong shop floor organisation with involvement in political issues beyond the shopfloor.

PPWAWU's membership figures since the merger are contained in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: PPWAWU membership figures, 1987 - 1993

Year	Membership	Difference	% Change
1987	23 310	-	-
1988	29 965	+ 6 655	+ 28,5
1989	32 586	+ 2 621	+ 9
1991	42 430	+ 9 844	+ 30
1993	37 951	- 4 479	- 10,5
1995 [4]	53 425	+15 474	+ 41

Sources: PPWAWU Annual Reports, 1987 - 89 and Bi-Annual Reports, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

The figures in this table show that the union has achieved phenomenal growth since the mid 1980s, particularly if we consider that PWAWU had 11 856 members and NUPAWO 2 163 at the launch of COSATU in 1985.[5] In 1995 the union had 53 425 members in 15 branches throughout the country. These members were from the pulp and paper, printing, packaging,

furniture, wood working and forestry[6] sectors of the economy. No reliable figures are available on PPWAWU's representivity in these industries, but the union's 1993 Bi-annual Report gave estimate figures, shown in Table 2 below, which show that it does not represent a majority in any of the industries it organises.

TABLE 2: PPWAWU's Representivity and Growth Potential by Industry:

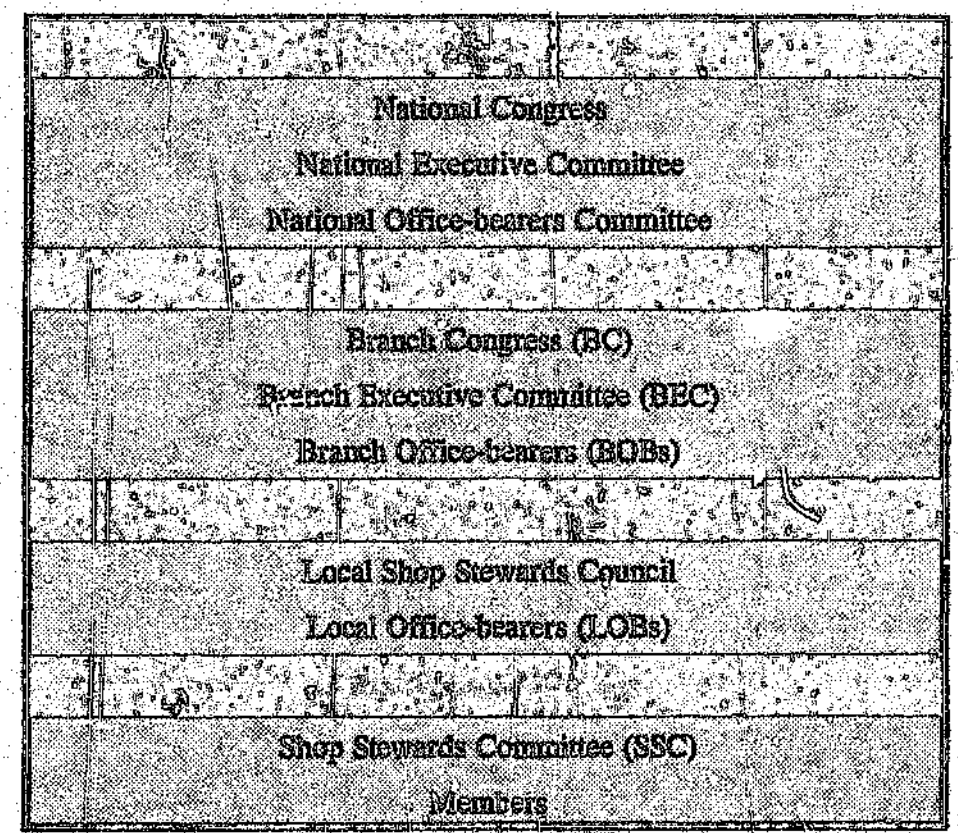
Sector/Industry	1991 Total (union members)	1993 Total (union members)	Industry Total (growth potential)
Pulp & Paper	6 478	7 163	20 000
Recycling	1 076	500	incl. above
Printing	11 025	10 199	40 000
Wood/plywood	9 178	7 846	N/A
Furniture	3 097	2 269	18 000
Forestry/sawmills	11 576	9 850	90 000
Total	42 430	37 827	168 000

Source: PPWAWU Bi-Annual Report, 1993, p. 24.

Although the union has continued to grow steadily through the years it has remained relatively small by COSATU standards.[7] One of the consequences of this is that its resource base has remained small given that it relies almost entirely on membership subscriptions which are set at a level at which even the lowest paid worker can afford. This situation has imposed severe capacity limitations on the union, with the result that basic services like membership, shop stewards' and staff training have suffered over the years. Lack of resources has also made it extremely difficult for the union to attract enough highly skilled full-time officials because it could not afford to pay competitive staff salaries.

This chapter is not intended to give a detailed history of PPWAWU and the way its structures operate. However, it is important at this point to sketch out briefly how the structures of governance function in the union. This is important particularly given the distinction made in this and other chapters between responses of the various structures of the union. Table 3 below shows the structures of PPWAWU from the factory level upwards. This table should be read together with APPENDIX 2 which gives more details on how these structures relate to one another.

TABLE 3: PPWAWU STRUCTURES:



Source: Compiled from the Constitution of PPWAWU.

An important aspect of the above table is that although each higher structure has got more decision-making powers than the one below it, the entire organisation of the structures hinges on the principle that higher structures should base their decisions on mandates by lower

structures. This principle places a heavy obligation on higher structures continually to seek the views and approval of lower structures before taking a decision. Put in another way, union members and any of the lower structures may reject or frustrate efforts to implement a decision of a higher structure if they feel they were not afforded an opportunity to have a say in its formulation. One of the solutions that PPWAWU, and the other unions in COSATU, have devised to overcome the problem is to ensure that the majority of delegates in all union structures are shop stewards who are also expected to sit in factory and local structures.

The second point to make about union structures is that full-time officials do not have full decision-making and voting p. ..rs in the union. However, they can suggest or recommend issues or make proposals for consideration by shop stewards delegates.

3. Worker Participation Schemes in South Africa

Worker participation or participatory management is a relatively new management strategy in South Africa. Up until the mid-1980s it was totally foreign to industrial relations and practices on the shopfloor. The factory regime, which prevailed up to and beyond this period, was characterised by authoritarianism and racism and relied on coercive methods, rather than consent, to obtain the co-operation of the workforce in the labour process. This workplace regime, which Webster (1987) has labelled 'racial despotism'[8], together with a highly repressive state machinery, created a very hostile environment for the emergence of effective union organisation on the shopfloor. However, in his study of the metal industry Webster (1985) has argued that around the early 1980s union organisation had become "a permanent feature."[9] The same can be said of all the industries in which the post-1973 unions were organising. As these unions grew in strength and in numbers, they gradually undermined authoritarian workplace regimes and forced management to explore other ways of winning the co-operation of the workforce.

Two reasons have been advanced to explain why participatory management became an attractive option for a number of South African companies[10]:

Firstly, the twin pillars on which South African companies had relied for decades, cheap labour and tariff protection, were becoming shaky.[11] The inroads which the union movement continued to make in their struggles for a decent wage gradually eroded the cheap labour system. At the same time employers came to acknowledge for the first time that unions were here to stay and that a lasting solution had to be found.

Also, as the country gradually approached the consummation of a democratic dispensation many employers realised that tariffs would not last too long, meaning that with tariffs reduced or removed altogether they were going to face competition from the rest of the world. They had to face the reality that South African companies do not compare well with their overseas counterparts and if cheap foreign goods were to invade the local market a number of businesses would not be able to survive. Eliciting the co-operation and consent of the workforce through more acceptable means therefore became an attractive and viable option.

A second reason which has been noted, mainly by unionists[12], is that some companies predicted a change in government well in advance and sought to improve their image in order to avoid reprisals from a new democratic government. In pursuance of this goal some companies also tried to target key political activists in the liberation movement for recruitment. PG Bison for example, employed Murphy Morobe, then a high-profile leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF) with the express intention of using him to win employees to management's perspective and as proof that they were sympathetic and committed to the objectives of the democratic movement. The more enlightened among management representatives often expressed the view that management had to anticipate changes in the political sphere by taking pro-active action. Christo Nel (1990), then a Director of PG Bison in charge of the TPQ process, raised this issue,

> By the turn of the century, and probably much earlier, South Africa will have evolved into a non-racial democratic system. Business needs to ask itself whether it is possible for the macro sociopolitical and economic environment to undergo fundamental restructuring of power, ownership and decision-making, and for business to remain aloof from the transformation. It is clearly impossible.[13]

A Nampak Polyfoil worker summed it up very cogently when he observed:

> The change process was introduced because management saw that apartheid is dying and competition will grow. They realised that if they are not up to standard they will lose the market. It is not because they care about the workers. (Worker No. 26, Nampak Polyfoil)

PG Bison was the first company organised by PPWAWU to introduce participatory processes in its plants and nationally. The process was started in 1988 but it only took off in 1989/90 when some of the processes were put into practice. On the other hand, the Nampak group entered the 1990s without any change in its management style. Indeed, it was at the beginning of the decade that the group, which at the time fell under Barlow Rand, earned itself a reputation as 'union basher, particularly around the time of the national strike by PPWAWU members which had a crippling effect in some of the key divisions of the group. Although the strike, called by the union in support of its demand for centralised bargaining, failed to achieve the union's objectives it came as a great shock to management as they had not expected that the union could have the capacity to organise a national strike. The group's greatest concern at the time was the bad publicity that the strike had generated nationally and internationally at a time when the country was emerging from isolation and economic protectionism. As Nampak Polyfoil's general manager, Loutjie de Jongh put it,

> You know, when South Africa was operating in an isolated economy your future was a lot more secure because you were not competitive on an international basis. A lot of this protection is going away. Wherever in the world we've go to make sure that we are a world class company, that we can compete against the best in the world. So what we've got to do is we've got to combine all our resources quite aggressively....And there is no room for in-fighting.[14]

Thus the strike forced Nampak to engage in this introspection and the group's change process emerged in the post strike period in 1991, but even then it took a long time before the changes became group policy. Nampak Polyfoil was one of the first Nampak plants to experiment with change. Below we look at how these changes unfolded in both companies, particularly the two plants which are the subject of this study.

4. A Tale of Two Factories

4.1 Nampak Polyfoil, Johannesburg

Nampak Limited is South Africa's leading packaging and printing company with 14 divisions. In 1994 it employed 17 392 permanent employees in 120 business units throughout the country.[15] It also has interests in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom. Nampak was formed in 1968 and for many years it fell under Barlow Rand Limited. However, following Barlow Rand's unbundling exercise the group left Barlow Rand in 1990. CG Smith is now the holding company. Nampak is one of the most diversified companies in the industry, particularly when compared to its overseas counterparts.[16] Its product range includes paper packaging, metal packaging, printing, plastics, tissue and sanitary products. Polyfoil is one of the divisions of the Nampak group.

The Nampak Polyfoil factory in Nancefield, Johannesburg is one of four plastic packaging factories under the Polyfoil division. It manufactures polyethylene-based retail carrier bags, shrink-wrapping plastic film, bread plastic bags and other related plastic products. It is the oldest of the four, having been started in Pretoria in the early sixties. In 1970 Nampak bought the Pretoria factory and another smaller operation in Nancefield at the same site as the present factory. The Pretoria factory was later moved to Nancefield and merged with the smaller factory.

In 1992 Nampak Polyfoil had over 300 employees, including management. Of this figure 270 workers fell within PPWAWU's bargaining unit. The union's actual membership was 218 or 80,7% of eligible workers. Table 4 below shows the race and gender divisions of the workforce.

TABLE 4: Nampak Polyfoil Workforce, 1993, By Gender and Race:

Gender			Race				
M	F	Total	African	Coloured	Asian	White	Total
205	65	270	157	97	1	15	270
76%	24%	100%	58%	36%	0,3%	5,5%	100%

Source: Compiled from Nampak Polyfoil Employee Records, (Weekly Paid), January 1993.

An important aspect of the stratification of the Polyfoil workforce is the high proportion of coloured workers (36%) and women (24%) in the workforce. Almost all the coloured workers live in the predominantly coloured township of Eldorado Park while the women live in Soweto and Eldorado Park. But as will be shown later race and gender divisions did not have any influence on the way union members responded to change in the factory. This could be explained by the fact that the factory has not discriminated between coloured and African workers in its past and present employment policies. All were subjected to the same harsh treatment and thus there is none of the jealousy and competition which usually characterise relations between coloured and African workers in the same plant. Another explanation seems to be the fact that the union has succeeded in fostering worker solidarity which cuts across race and gender divisions. This is also reflected in the composition of the shopfloor leadership which has coloured and women workers in proportion to their numbers in the workforce.

The factory is organised into ten departments which follow the division of labour between administration and production and, on the shopfloor, the sequence of the production process. On the shopfloor the production process starts in a department know as Premix where the raw materials, plastic granules and colourants are mixed according to the colour specifications of the customer. The factory also has its own recycling department, Regran (short for regranulation), where off-cuts and reject plastic bags are sorted by colour and recycled into granules for making second grade plastic bags. The mixed materials are then taken to the next

department, Extrusion, where they are melted down under very high temperatures. The molten plastic is then blown into bubbles which are then cooled and rolled into big rolls ready for making plastic carrier bags and plastic film for other packaging purposes. The next two departments, Printing and Bagging, are closely integrated as each printing machine is joined to a bagging machine with the result that the two processes are continuous. The plastic rolls are put into the machine and, as they run through, they are printed and then cut out and sealed into bags of various sizes. Bagging is the biggest department in the factory employing, at the time of the research, 143 workers. The majority of the women workers are employed in this section of the factory, doing operative and baling work.

Finished and baled bags are then sent to though to Factory Administration for labelling and the particulars of each batch are entered on computer before it is taken to the Stores/Despatch department. The other departments are Maintenance, Canteen and Office Administration.

The labour process at Nampak polyfoil is simple and requires relatively low levels of skill among the majority of the workforce. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, work is organised along classical Taylorist lines where a clear distinction is drawn between conception and execution of tasks. This distinction allows management to determine the way in which work is done at the factory. Management does the conception (i.e. strategic planning, work design, etc) while the rest of the workers carry out instructions in executing those plans. This has necessitated the creation of a hierarchical structure to control and monitor the workforce, with team leaders and supervisors as the people who interface with the workers on a regular basis. A shop steward expressed the frustration of the workforce with this hierarchy:

> Let me clarify that at the moment he [general manager] has got a committee that he consults with all the time. So what we are saying is that we must have our representative present in that structure. We do not want things to come down to us as matters that have already been decided upon coming to us via certain people, namely, from the general manager to the operations manager who will then take it to middle managers, then middle managers taking it to supervisors, then supervisors taking it down to us as instructions saying, 'we are doing this'.[17]

Secondly, the production section of the factory relies heavily on modern technology, with the majority of the workers performing operative and machine minding operations. An aspect of the labour process, which is a result of the above, is the extent to which these operative jobs have been stripped of their worth and rendered cheap. Although each worker performs clearly defined tasks set out in elaborate job descriptions, the nature of the labour process is such that the jobs are repetitive. Thus, compared to what prevails in many other factories and industries, an operator's job at Nampak Polyfoil is not highly skilled or well paid and, the majority of operators are women who are graded lower and paid less than their male counterparts. But the workers maintain that machines on their own cannot drive the labour process, they require the intervention by the worker. A shop steward argued that the separation of conception from execution stifles the labour process and leads to oppression of the workers:

> The people should control themselves so that they can be efficient, because now these supervisors and the team leaders are oppressing the people and they are doing nothing at the end of the day. When they knock off here they are having more money than what I got, and I'm doing the whole job. In terms of quality and proper bags that should be packed, the operator is responsible for that job. If that job can be rejected by the customer the operator suffers at the end of the day. And now where does the quality start? It starts from extrusion, goes to the quality controllers from check up and is then sent to bagging. Now all that chain is not being considered. Also within that chain there is a quality manager. That chain is not being considered. But now the poor operator must come and suffer at the end of the day, sit here with a final written warning, at the end of the day loses the job.[18]

In the past, when the factory was immune from the pressures of foreign competition, management could afford to employ low-skilled and poorly paid workers and not bother about the effects of these factors on productivity. However, with the pressures of outside competitors management is increasingly becoming aware of the importance of having a motivated workforce which will co-operate in raising productivity levels.[19] For Nampak Polyfoil competition is of three types. Firstly, competitors in the export markets who produce better quality and sell for very competitive prices. Secondly, outside competitors who sell their better quality and reasonably priced goods in South Africa, thus competing with local producers. Thirdly, foreign producers who relocate their plants to cheap labour zones in South Africa to produce cheaply for the domestic market. Most of those in this category are Taiwanese

businesses who operate in areas like the old KwaNdebele, Botshabelo and so on. Nampak's Polyfoil division, which operates four plants nationally, remains the largest manufacturer of retail checkout plastic carrier bags in South Africa[20] and it continues to improve its market position every year. However, the competitive pressures mentioned above remain a constant threat to its market leadership, hence the need to win the co-operation of the workforce to achieve its objectives. Indeed, this was the overriding consideration which prompted Polyfoil management to initiate the change process which promised greater participation to the workforce. However, evidence gathered for this study, some of which is presented later in this chapter, seems to indicate that management will not find it easy to win the co-operation of the workforce until they allow meaningful involvement by workers in decision-making and address the low wages and the poor working conditions and skills of the workforce.

The relationship between workers and management has historically been very conflictual at the factory. At the root of this conflict has been the issue of low wages and poor working conditions. Accounts by workers testify to this fact. One of the long-serving workers explained:

> In the past the bosses gave very little increase. The first strike at Polyfoil was in 1972 over wages. At that time the company was owned by Mr Hart. Since then the increases we get are better. Yes, the union has helped us get improvements in wages.[21]

Another worker recalled:

> We were exploited. Wages were very low. We took strike action demanding more pay and better conditions. Some workers were dismissed. Those who remained joined the union.[22]

The factory general manager, Loutjie de Jongh, admits that in the past they relied on what he calls "a coercive style of management".[23] This coercive style of management, together with low pay and poor working conditions, became the main target of the new unions in the 1970s and the 1980s. Thus when the PWAWU started organising workers at the factory in 1984 it found the ground very fertile to receive its message. Unionisation had a profound impact on

workers, particularly the early recruits. They saw it as a very powerful weapon in their fight against injustices on the shopfloor. As one worker put it,

> In the past everyone was on his/her own. The union has brought everyone together.[24]

Another worker explained what the union meant to him.

> I joined the union because management was harassing us. So I joined the union for security and protection. I also wanted to join other workers to fight apartheid at this factory, eg. low wages.[25]

The above statements point to a direct relationship between the workers' struggle through the union and low pay, poor working conditions and a coercive style of management on the shopfloor. The union's effectiveness was measured by its ability to bring about improvements to wages and other conditions of work. All the workers in the sample said they had joined the union for better wages, protection and job security. Asked whether the union had helped bring about improvements in these areas, the majority of the workers answered positively as follows: wages (80%), the physical working environment (60%), treatment by supervisors/foremen (77%), treatment by senior managers (77%), solidarity among workers (90%) and other conditions like leave, bonuses, etc (90%). The when the union called a national strike for centralised bargaining by all Nampak workers, Nampak Polyfoil was one of the strongest bases of PPWAWU. Although the strike did not achieve its objective workers at the factory went back as a united force and continued to support all the campaigns of PPWAWU and COSATU. One such campaign was COSATU's anti-VAT campaign which culminated in a general strike in November 1991. According to the shop stewards the entire workforce went out in support of the call. After the strike management threatened to discipline all the workers. This case posed a serious dilemma for management in that they desperately needed the co-operation of the workforce but they knew they could not get it by coercive means. A shop steward explained how the case eventually led to talks about co-operation.

> When we came back they wanted to discipline all the workers who were involved. They even threatened to dismiss workers. So we fought the case. Management then said that we should devise a plan that would avert similar confrontations in future. So

> we asked them to give us an idea of the plan they had in mind. They could not tell us what they had in mind. All they said was that we should go to a workshop and they would reveal their plan at the workshop. They then proposed that we should go to a workshop in Rustenburg, the whole shop stewards committee and middle and top management, including some supervisors. When we got to the workshop we started with a value sharing session. That is how the change process started.[26]

The 'change process' which emerged from the Rustenburg workshop had worker participation in decision-making as one of its key elements. The initial stage of the change process involved attempts to draw up and ratify a set of common values by management and the workforce represented by the union. A series of consultations to elicit views of the entire workforce were held and tremendous progress was made as some of the fears from both sides were dispelled and differences began to narrow. However, the values were never ratified as discussions soon got bogged down in trying to arrive at a common interpretation of participation. Some of the workers and shop stewards also felt that their involvement in the change process was having the effect of weakening their union. Two leading shop stewards, the chairperson and the secretary, who felt the change process was making them unaccountable and was rendering the union weak resigned. The rest of the shop stewards were happy with the way things were going but the resignation of the two precipitated a crisis as they were leading members of the shop stewards committee. The committee called a meeting of the workforce to discuss the matter. The disgruntled former shop stewards explained their actions and succeeded in persuading the general meeting to suspend the workers' involvement in the process because it was weakening the union.[27] So the change process was suspended in 1992.

A distinctive feature of this first phase of the Nampak Polyfoil change process, compared to TPQ at PG Bison in Piet Retief, is the fact that it emerged from the realities of the shopfloor. The union commanded a lot of support and power on the shopfloor, and it was able to use such power to paralyse production. Management, on the other hand, found that they could no longer rely on coercion to resolve disputes with the workforce. The change process was therefore a strategy which was specifically designed to elicit the co-operation of the workforce in production.

Nampak Polyfoil management has since come up with a new strategy which they claim is

aimed to take the factory to world-class manufacturing standards. Unlike the earlier change process which originated from the concrete conditions prevailing at the factory at the time, world class manufacturing is a strategy adopted by the entire Nampak group. Part of this strategy is to set up 'natural working teams', work teams which bring people in related stages of the production process together. Management's notion of worker participation is that workers should participate at the level of their jobs through the teams.[28] A summary of the group's world class vision is contained in APPENDIX 3.

4.2 PG Bison, Piet Retief

PG Bison, Piet Retief is a particle board manufacturing operation owned by the PG Bison group. The group, formed in 1986, has 37 operations nationally.[29] In addition, the group has a factory in Zimbabwe, and distribution centres in Namibia and Botswana. The PG Bison group is owned 75% by PG Shutterpruffe Industries (PGSI) and 25% by Mondi. It has two thirds of the particle board manufacturing market[30] and is the sole manufacturer of 'Formica'[31] in South Africa. Sappi Novobord is PG Bison's major competitor in this market. The other competitor, though very small, is Chipboard Industries which has a factory in Umtata in the Eastern Cape.

The entry of SA into the global economy has not brought about any significant competitive pressures for PG Bison. Very little of the product is imported from outside and instead the company has continued to increase the volume of its exports. The company is determined to maintain its leading position in the market and has set itself three basic goals, namely:

a) to be totally customer-focused,
b) to be flexible, low-cost and responsive, and
c) to empower people to take responsibility for their performance through participation and personal growth.[32]

PG Bison has 3 361 employees nationally, of which about 2 000 are weekly-paid employees and the rest are monthly paid employees and management. About 65% of the workforce is unionised. PPWAWU is the biggest union with more than 1 680 members followed by the

National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) with just over 300 members. The other unions are the United Workers' Union of South Africa (UWUSA) with 129 members and the Black and Allied Workers' Union (BAWU) with 39 members.

PG Bison, Piet Retief is one of the group's five manufacturing operations nationally[33]. Its core product is particle board or chip board which is used in the manufacture of wood-based furniture. In contrast to Nampak Polyfoil, which is based in a city industrial area, PG Bison, Piet Retief is based in a rural area and most of its workers have their roots in the rural areas of northern KwaZulu/Natal and the Eastern Transvaal. In 1993 the factory employed a total of about 600 permanent people. About 150 of these were managers, supervisor, foremen, artisans, and administrative staff, almost all of them white. The number of workers within PPWAWU's bargaining unit numbered about 450 of whom 420 were PPWAWU members. The majority of PG Bison's employees are men, with most of the few women occupying managerial and clerical jobs. Thus the division of labour on the shopfloor is mainly between black male workers who do semi-skilled and unskilled manual and operative jobs and white workers who do supervisory and other skilled jobs. The labour process is much more complex and requires greater levels of skill than at Polyfoil. Thus the proportion of the workforce which does semi-skilled to skilled jobs is much greater than at Polyfoil. However, there is a large pool of the workforce which performs unskilled jobs throughout the factory, with the majority being located in the finishing, saws and distribution sections of the factory.

The production process starts in the Logyard where logs are off-loaded from trucks and stacked in preparation for chipping or grinding. The logs are then fed into the grinding machine using a mobile loader. The grinder cuts the logs up into very fine wood chips or particles which are then taken to the next department, the Flake and Dryer Section, by a conveyor. In the driers the chips are refined, mixed with a special wood glue and are then dried at high temperatures before they are taken to the main department of the factory, Forming and Pressing. There are four forming and pressing machines (or lines, as they are called). In forming and pressing two kinds of chips are used in the manufacture of particle board (or chipboard). Very fine chips are used for the outer sides or surfaces while coarser chips with stronger fibres are used for the inside of the board. The chips are then laid on big

metal trays, first fine chips for one surface, then coarse chips for the inside, and finally fine chips again for the other surface. The tray then moves on for pressing under very high temperatures. This is the most crucial part in the production of particle board and the quality of the chips, the amount of glue and the moisture applied play a very important part in determining the final quality of board that comes through the process. From here the board is taken out, dried and taken to the next department.

Once board is made it moves on by conveyor, but at the end it is lifted manually to Sanding where the surfaces are re[illegible]d and the edges are trimmed. From here it is taken by forklift to Saws department where it is cut up to the required sizes and is then ready for transporting to customers locally or overseas. But there is also a small department called Edging where veneer edging is put on specific orders. From these last two departments the board is packed into stacks according to orders.

There are other ancillary departments at PG Bison, namely, Engineering, Site Maintenance, Knife Workshop, Transport, Reject Recovery, Distribution, Security and Production and Technical Research.

PG Bison relies on sophisticated machinery to manufacture particle board, particularly in the flake and dryer and forming and pressing departments. Workers in these departments perform operative jobs which could be classified as semi-skilled. Most of the rest of the labour process involves manual work performed largely by unskilled labourers. However, human intervention plays a crucial role throughout the labour process. The workers' argument for greater participation in decisions is based on their experience in the labour process and their view that workers understand the process better. A shop steward made this point very clearly in an interview.

> It is very important that the people who do the work with their own hands should be involved in decisions, planning and so on. They must be involved. Let me make an example of an operator and his assistant, a sweeper. These people are involved in this process almost eight hours full. Every minute, every hour, they see what is happening. They know what causes problems in the process and they can be in a position to see

which things are not necessary in the production process. They have ideas on what needs to be done in order to produce better. But now management here does not listen to workers.[34]

Even in those parts of the factory which involve sophisticated technology, where tasks are supposed to be pre-determined, the tacit skills of the workers play a crucial role. For example, the main operator in forming and pressing, Line 1, relied on his own experience and intuition rather than the written manual, to determine the appropriate moisture required in board manufacture because the prescribed moisture almost invariably failed to produce good quality board[35]. The same can be said of operations in other parts of the factory. Thus the intervention of the worker has a very important role in the labour process at PG Bison, and seeking the consent and co-operation of the worker, rather than reccurse to coercion seemed the most sensible thing for management to do in trying to address quality and productivity problems.

But Piet Retief management was not ready for such a change because for a long time they had relied on a coercive style of management which was buttressed by racism in and outside the factory. This management style relied on Taylorist methods where there was a clear separation between conception and execution and where management was highly centralised and the labour process strictly supervised. A 1993 SWOP investigation concluded that the factory, with a permanent workforce of 334, was 'over-supervised'. The study found that the factory employed 40 supervisors/foremen, almost all of whom were white, which worked out to a foreman/supervisor for every 8 workers.[36] It was this entrenched culture of coercive management coupled with racist politics by management which, as will become clear below, was to lead to the failure of the TPQ process at PG Bison, Piet Retief.

PG Bison workers joined the union for the same reasons as those at Nampak Polyfoil, namely better wages and protection and job security. Sixty three percent had been members since the introduction of the union at the factory in 1984 while the rest joined later. In their assessment of the union's performance a large majority agreed that the union had helped bring about improvements in their wages (100%), the physical working environment (62%), treatment by supervisors/foremen (93%), treatment by senior managers (85%), solidarity among the

workers (95%) and other conditions like bonuses, leave, etc (97%). But workers qualified their answers by stating that the improvements were relative to what prevailed before and that there was still room for improvement on many issues. For example, racist practices by first line management as well as senior managers was raised by most workers as the single most contentious issue in the factory. It is interesting here that the results are very similar to those of Nampak Polyfoil. It would appear that the union has made a significant impact to workers conditions in all these categories. But on the 'physical working environment the result is much lower than the rest, which seems to suggest that the union has not paid enough attention to this issue.

Although the style of management was the same as that described under Nampak Polyfoil above, namely a coercive style, the change process at PG Bison emerged in a different way and under a different set of conditions. The group came into being at a time of turmoil in the industrial relations scene. Not only was labour beginning to assert its power on the shopfloor and beyond, but there was also a massive offensive by the entire liberation movement to end the political system of apartheid. Many business people were becoming increasingly uncertain about their future and were particularly apprehensive about the prospects of doing business under a government led by the African National Congress (ANC). This uncertainty grew out of two major concerns. Firstly, some in the business community were worried that a new government might take strong measures, like nationalisation, against those businesses which were perceived to be racist or close to the apartheid government.[37] At the time nationalisation was one of the demands of the trade unions and this instilled a lot of fears in business circles. The second concern was that the end of apartheid would bring with it new competitive pressure on South African businesses. Some business people realised that they could not achieve international competitiveness without the co-operation of their workers.

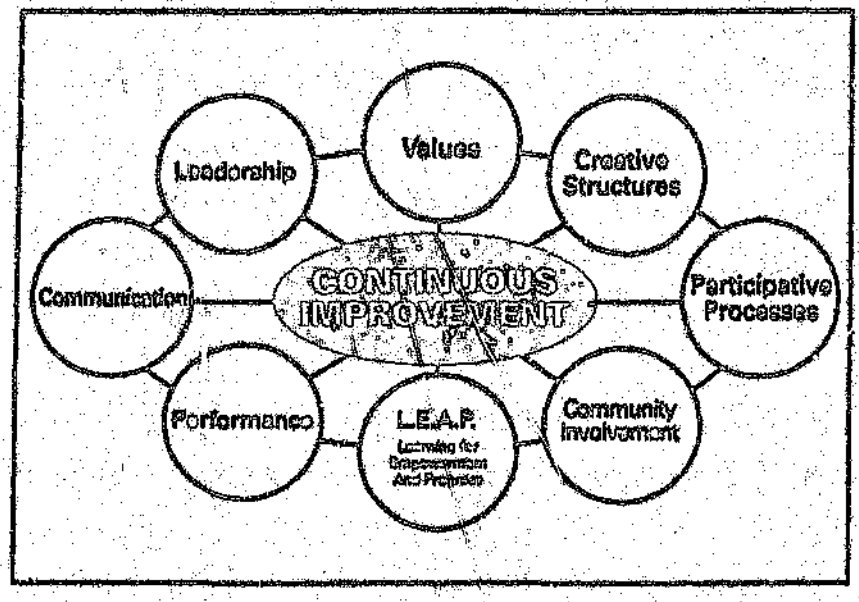
In 1988 the PG Bison group introduced a 'continuous improvement' process called Total Productivity and Quality (TPQ). It was intended to address the concerns mentioned above. At this stage not only was the national union and its branch structures left out of the process, but it would appear that part of PG Bison's strategy was to keep the union in the dark until initial results had been achieved. Indeed, when the union got information about TPQ and

demanded to negotiate the process with management, PG Bison insisted that the structures and process that they already initiated should not be dismantled. This failure to inform the national union as well as the insistence by the company that structures and processes already in place should remain fuelled fears by the national union leadership that TPQ was intended to co-opt union members and weaken the union.

The process started off with 'value-sharing workshops' in each workplace where workers and management discussed their fears and aspirations in order to arrive at a set of common values. The workshops were facilitated by Chrisso Nel, then a PG Bison director and a leading member of the Consultative Business Movement (CBM). The ideas which emerged from the workshops then formed the basis for new structures and values which were finally adopted and published as a booklet in 1991.

One of the central elements of TPQ was worker participation in decision-making. The structures set up to facilitate such participation included work groups called 'in-a-groups' as well as a national forum comprising managers and worker representatives (shop stewards) from all PG Bison operations nationally. A set of 'values' which included a commitment by management to promote worker participation, were also agreed.[38] PG Bison used what they called a "Continuous Improvement Model" to represent the processes that they initiated. Table 5 below shows the inter-relationship of the elements of the model. It will be noted that participation features prominently in this model, not only in terms of what is termed 'participative processes', but also in terms of 'creative structures', leadership and communication. The promise of participation and improved communication with management sounded attractive to many workers and it was seen to offer greater flexibility in doing jobs and many felt it would result in the redundancy of shopfloor supervision.

TABLE 5: PG Bison's Continuous Improvement Model:



Source: PG Bison Values and Statement of Objectives, p. 5.

While some workers and shop stewards were happy with TPQ because they believed that it would improve their conditions and give them a meaningful say in decision-making on the shopfloor, a number of others, including union officials and the national executive committee of the union were sceptical because they suspected that PG Bison only wanted to win the co-operation of workers to improve productivity without giving anything to workers in return for their efforts. In 1990 the process was suspended at the insistence of the national leadership of the union, pending a proper negotiation of how the process was to be implemented. Details of the events leading up to the suspension are discussed in section 5.1 below. Since then the process has had its ups and downs and, at the time the research was conducted in 1993 and early in 1994 the process had virtually come to a halt in most of the operations.[39] However, in June 1994 a national forum was convened to revive the process.

5. PFWAWU's Response to Participatory Management

The union's response to participatory management has gone through a number of phases and has evolved into a more sophisticated response compared to what it was in 1989 and 1990. Moreover, the response has in recent years come to reflect a greater consensus among members and leaders of the union as well as between the various levels of the union, namely, members, shop stewards, branch and national structures and full-time officials. However, there are still different points of emphasis by different people and different layers in the union. This discussion now turns to an analysis of the union's response at both factories.

A research paper by two PFWAWU unionists who were commissioned by their union to investigate a suitable response for the union identified three options available to the union, namely, to stand back and let it happen, obstruct the process or to become centrally involved.[40] It will be argued here that the union's response to participatory management involved one and sometimes all these strategies as it evolved. Furthermore, there were also instances where different levels or layers of the union responded in contradictory ways to what management was introducing. For example, there were times when union members on the shopfloor decided to get involved while the national and branch structures had decided to obstruct the process and vice versa.

5.1 Phase One: Worker Involvement versus Union Obstruction

The PG Bison case provides a good example of the initial response to participatory management. Shop stewards in PG Bison factories and, in a number of cases, workers responded very positively to the introduction of TPQ by their management. The reaction of many shop stewards and workers at the time was, according to Joseph Mthembu, a full time shop steward based at PG Bison in Germiston, based on the view that TPQ was an answer to many of the demands of the workers.

> This TPQ started in 1987 in one of our branches called PG Laminates in Alrode. They (management) wanted to cover the whole group in 1988. The main reason of management was that we have been demanding a living wage and we have been demanding worker control and that workers should be represented in the board of

directors. Now they said, 'here is the time!'.[41]

Workers in Piet Retief were equally optimistic about the positive benefits TPQ would bring about. They had high hopes that TPQ would bring them all the 'good things' they had been fighting for - an end to race discrimination, an improvement to wages and working conditions, adult basic education, an end to unfair dismissals and bad treatment by management and, above all, 'the opportunity and freedom to make decisions'.[42] Management was aware that workers' expectations had been raised by these promises. In the value-sharing workshops which preceded the introduction of TPQ workers were allowed to voice out their frustrations in the company and to express their hopes. This process made Leon Cohen, the chief executive officer of the group to comment later that,

> (W)e had to be ready to move, because we were creating expectations, which were coming at us very quickly.[43]

A shop steward who was a rank and file union member at the time put it thus:

> When it started it appeared to me as a good thing because I thought it would bring good things and a bright future for the workers.[44]

But there were some sceptics among the workers too. Andries Fakude, a full-time shop steward in Piet Retief was an ordinary union member at the time TPQ was introduced. He is one of those who favoured a more cautious approach to the process:

> I said that the workers need to check this thing carefully because it would bring us a lot of dangers and that those who had started it were very clever and had taken time to plan it. It looked good but it would be dangerous to us in the end.[45]

Fakude's suspicion and caution came from his experience as a shop steward before this time. He was then part of what some in the union call 'second layer leadership', active union members, some of the ex-shop stewards, who play an informal leadership role among the workforce. These 'second layer' leaders play a key role during periods of high mobilization

and heated debates in the unions and often act to either complement or act as a 'counter-weight' to the power and influence of elected shop stewards during decisive moments. They also tend to take a more global and long-term view of issues and always draw on their previous experiences with management to caution against hasty acceptance of management initiatives. Pakade explained why he was suspicious:

> What surprised me was the fact that it is very difficult for management to sympathise with the workers and their conditions without the workers first making demands. Just for management to say 'this is good for the workers, we want this, we want to end apartheid'! The other word that made me suspicious was 'total productivity and quality'. People involved in productivity are the workers, especially black workers. They are the people who produce the goods.[46]

The shop stewards also responded positively to TPQ but the problem was that they, as worker leaders, got involved in it without a strategy or plan of their own. A worker who was a shop steward at the time said that they as a committee accepted TPQ "to see how it works, to give it a try". [47] Some workers maintain that it was the shop stewards who played a key role in persuading the workers to accept the process.[48] But lack of strategic planning among the shop stewards and lack of direction from the union office and the local and branch structures put the shop stewards in a position where they had to fit in with the plans of management. They got sucked into a myriad of committees, sub-committees and 'bosberaade' which produced little or no tangible results for the workers. These additional activities overstretched them to a point where they became alienated from their base, the workers. Accusations of selling out and co-option were then levelled at the shop stewards committee especially when they failed to give reports from their meetings with management, except when they were acting as conduits for unpopular management directives. One worker complained,

> The shop stewards were co-opted by TPQ. Every time they went out to Natal Spur they became weaker. They never gave us reports from their meetings at Natal Spur[49] and they neglected worker's cases and grievances, eg. on grading.[50]

The gap between the leaders and the led became so wide and morale of the workforce was so low that the very existence of the union at the factory was in jeopardy. In the words of a shop

steward who was a rank and file member at the time,

> The union nearly collapsed here. In fact, at the time there was no union here except in name only.[51]

The union official and local and branch committees played almost no role at the initial stages of TPQ. The non-interventionist role of the official has a number of explanations. The first, and most important, is that the union official responsible for the factory was not confident about the issue as it was new to him and the union. The union, for its part, did not provide any education, support and guidance to full-time officials on how to deal with TPQ in particular, and workplace restructuring in general. The organiser thus left the entire process to the shop stewards and the workers to handle. A shop steward says this was their problem with the organisers when TPQ was introduced.

> (W)hen you talk to them about serious issues you find that they are too shallow. They can't go deep on that issue....Yes, shopfloor issues, issues like TPQ....When you take things like that to the organiser you find that he does not give you any direction or advice. When you ask for advice you find that he is not stable, you know. He is shaky. He just leaves everything to you to decide.[52]

The second explanation is that because of the strong tradition of worker control in the union it was difficult for the union official to intervene unless he/she was invited by the workers and the shop stewards. Some workers and shop stewards pointed out that there was a concerted effort on the part of the then shop stewards to block any contact or communication between the official and the workers because they feared that the official would persuade the workers to boycott the process. It is important to note here that the shop stewards were the first layer of the union to be targeted for TPQ 'training' and they continued to be in close contact with management over the issue through 'bosberaade' organised for management and shop stewards to develop strategies to implement the process. Unlike the usual shop stewards'/management meetings, the bosberaade were less formal (no minutes taken), and much more friendly encounters where shop stewards did not come with demands and mandates from the workers. For management these meetings were an ideal place to use every method at their disposal, like

slides, videos, consultants, etc., to put their point of view across to the shop stewards. It is not immediately clear why they bought into the process so easily, even leaving their constituency and the union behind. However one explanation offered by the workers is that, through the TPQ 'bosberaade', they had been introduced to a new lifestyle of hotels, free alcohol, travel by air or nice cars and other comforts that they were not accustomed to. Shadrack Mnisi, a new shop steward has his own explanation,

> The way I see it is that our management here gave nice things to our shop stewards, for example food, so that when a shop steward comes to management representing the workers he becomes scared to represent the workers' grievances because what the workers are demanding is too strong for him to put to management who is now his friend. He is giving you everything you want. When things are like that you will not attend union local structures because they do not give you anything.[53]

Sipho Kubheka offers another plausible argument on PG Bison which attempts to explain not only the reason for new class interests among certain shop stewards but also locates these interests in a context of managerial strategies and how workers respond to them:

> (M)anagement want to control the process. Now, controlling of that process means controlling or co-opting the shop stewards. That is the process. Secondly, they make promises to workers. Now, the trickle down starts with the shop stewards. The workers are still waiting for something to trickle down to them. They become impatient and frustrated. Now, I would not say blocking that process is because people understand that there is nothing in this. But it is because they were waiting for things to come down and those things are not coming down. So what they will do then is that they would bundle both management and their own shop stewards together and say, 'this is the problem'. So that is how I'm seeing the situation of Piet Retief.[54]

PG Bison workers told an anecdote about a shop steward at the time of TPQ who took his leave and days off very seriously. Nobody could persuade him to use his day off or leave to attend union meetings. But then one day he was on leave and a TPQ meeting was taking place. Nobody expected that he could come back from leave just to attend that meeting. But he did!

The third reason is that there was no union policy at branch level to guide the official on how to handle the issue.

The initial response of union members and shop stewards at Nampak Polyfoil was in many ways similar to that of PG Bison. But Nampak Polyfoil's change process came at a time when there was already a change in union approach to workplace change processes. Furthermore, the period of worker involvement in and enthusiasm for the change process was much shorter than at PG Bison. Because of these two significant differences the discussion of the union response at Nampak Polyfoil will be introduced under 'phase two' below.

The national leadership of the union represented in the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the National Office-Bearers (NOBs) adopted a very sceptical position from the beginning. An NEC meeting held on the 10 - 12 November 1989 discussed PG Bison's TPQ at length and the points which emerged from this discussion reflected the concerns of the leadership about TPQ:

> Their TPQ project is aimed at co-opting the workers into the free enterprise system. It is to counter the total change that the working class is out to bring about. It is also meant to reduce the militant unions into sweethearts. It is aimed to increase profits for the shareholders. It is meant to brainwash the workers....P.G. wants to survive in a post-apartheid society. The company is targeting shop stewards for this project.[55]

The resolution that came out of this discussion urged the union head office to find out more about TPQ, that the union should educate its membership about the dangers of this process and that union structures should formulate strategies to "oppose/combat" what PG Bison management was doing.[56] The NEC also noted with concern that PG Bison was recruiting certain "key figures within the ranks of the MDM (mass democratic movement)" in order to lend credibility to TPQ. The national office-bearers were mandated to ask these people to pull out of PG Bison.[57]

At the meeting of the NOBs, in January 1990, it had become clear to the national leadership that the decisions taken at the previous NEC meeting were either not reaching the shopfloor or were being ignored by union members and shop stewards as the process was continuing with the full involvement of the shop stewards. This strengthened fears by the leadership about the dangers of the process, namely, that it was aimed at co-opting the shop stewards and

weakening the union. Even in cases where the message of the NEC was reaching some shop stewards, it did not seem to have the effect of dampening the enthusiasm of those shop stewards for TPQ.[58] The national leadership found themselves in an embarrassing situation where they were taking decisions against the process whereas their membership continued to support it. So another directive was issued to full-time officials at the head office to ensure that local organisers called meetings with PG Bison shop stewards in their areas to convey directly the view that "the union does not sanction TPQ".[59] But the national office-bearers stopped short of censuring the shop stewards and simply advised that they should be told that when they go to TPQ meetings they do so "not as PPWAWU shop stewards but as PG Bison employees".[60] This situation illustrates the complex nature of leadership and power in a trade union, particularly in one where the tradition of worker control and bottom-up decision-making is deeply rooted. Both the national executive committee and the national office-bearers found themselves in a situation where they could see the dangers of TPQ but were unable to impose their views on lower levels of leadership and rank and file members who were directly affected by the issues under discussion.

It therefore became clear to the national leadership that a hardline position would only have the effect of alienating their base and opening them up to accusations of being bureaucratic and undemocratic. Thus the May 1990 NEC took a rather soft and more realistic position which argued that, "Our position should not be to reject TPQ but to come up with an alternative".[61] The meeting further instructed full-time officials to call meetings with PG Bison where the union would "turn the agenda to our favour" by making proposals around issues like training, national (centralised) bargaining at company level and full time shop stewards.[62] The first such meeting was a national meeting requested by the head office of the union. The company transported over a hundred PPWAWU, NUMSA, SACCAWU and UWUSA shop stewards and officials to Broederstroom near Pretoria for the meeting. By this time PG Bison management had already helped establish a structure of similar numbers of shop stewards called the "PG Bison National Shop Stewards Council" without the knowledge of PPWAWU, the majority union, but which had the apparent endorsement of the minority unions (NUMSA, UWUSA and SACCAWU). When PPWAWU officials arrived at the meeting they were not aware that the shop stewards present were, at the same time those who constituted the

management-initiated "PG Bison National Shop Stewards Council". There was even an elected committee of about six shop stewards which had prepared itself to run the proceedings. Management came to the meeting under the impression that PPWAWU too had seen the light and was coming to endorse both the structure and the process. PPWAWU officials had also done no canvassing among their shop stewards to alert them to what the NEC had instructed them to do. Thus the task of the PPWAWU officials at the meeting was not an easy one. But the company's attempt to stage-manage the meeting (by inviting shop stewards as if the meeting was a usual "National Shop Stewards Council", tabling an agenda which had not been discussed with the national union leadership beforehand and crowding the agenda with speeches and very little discussion on the assumption that all the parties accepted TPQ as given) was thwarted by a call for a caucus where some of the shop stewards were won over to the NEC's position that the entire process should be suspended until it had been negotiated afresh. The caucus position which won the day was captured in a key resolution:

a) TPQ was imposed by the employers on the workers;
b) The employers are already implementing TPQ using some of our members;
c) The underlying motive of TPQ is to co-opt workers and weaken our unions;
d) We, as unions, expect management to negotiate with us about anything they wish to introduce to workers, including TPQ;
e) The following was therefore agreed:

   i) If management want to introduce TPQ they must negotiate that with us. A properly constituted committee of shop stewards and officials should meet management for such negotiations;

   ii) Until that is done and an agreement reached the operation/implementation of TPQ (and its structures) should be suspended immediately at all factories.[63]

The conclusion of the meeting on this note left various participants with mixed feelings. The management representatives were left upset and disappointed but their determination to push ahead with TPQ was not diminished. They went back and instructed their plant managers to go ahead with the process. Two of the key architects of the process, Christo Nel, a director, and Harry de Klerk, a senior manager at PG Bison head office, went to factories around the country addressing workers and managers in order to control the damage caused. This was

another instance of management showing little respect for the union's autonomy and its right to report back to its members about the outcome of the meeting. In normal collective bargaining the union and management are afforded an opportunity to report-back to their respective constituencies so that they get fresh mandates. But in this instance this tradition was not followed by PG Bison. To the union's national leadership this was further evidence that management was intent on driving a wedge between the union and its membership at the company.

The union-initiated suspension of TPQ was met with mixed reactions by the shop stewards. Those who supported the process but had been out-manoeuvred and outvoted at the union caucus reacted angrily to the suspension. They felt that the high-profile involvement of full-time officials in the debate was contrary to the principle of worker control. As one pro-TPQ shop steward put it later,

> (I)t was officials who were participating to take that decision, who were pus[illegible]g the position of suspension....What I'm saying then, after the suspension we were discomfortable as the shop stewards.[64]

But there were some shop stewards for whom the suspension of TPQ was a victory. These were shop stewards who had not been won over by management but who were not articulate or sophisticated enough to oppose the process effectively. At the Broederstroom meeting opposition to TPQ was only expressed by full-time officials, but when the matter was taken to a vote the majority of shop stewards voted against the process. Unlike the pro-TPQ group many of whom stood to benefit personally from the process through promotions resulting from affirmative action programmes, this group was drawn mostly from those shop stewards with low levels of formal education whose promotion prospects were remote or non-existent or those who were at the same time political activists with a higher level of political consciousness. This group of shop stewards saw the TPQ process as one of management's strategies to co-opt the workers and weaken the union. For them their first loyalty was with the union and the workers' struggle. At PG Bison Piet Retief this is illustrated by an account by one of the shop stewards. Management always called those workers and shop stewards

"with some basic education" aside before making announcements to the rest of the workforce. "They would call us 'seniors' among the black workers", recalls the shop steward. He says the rest of the workforce was not involved, 'they were just following'.[65] Many of the so-called seniors were won over to TPQ and saw in it opportunities for their individual upward mobility. However, a few of these select workers and shop stewards remained loyal to the union and closed ranks with the rest of the workers and shop stewards. Each PG Bison plant nationally had a few sceptics like these, and although they were not good at articulating their fears in the early stages of the process, they later became the core of the anti-TPQ lobby when the process failed to yield results.

For the national leadership of the union the conclusion of the meeting was a victory in that it isolated the pro-TPQ shop stewards and consolidated the majority behind the NEC position. Although this victory did not necessarily translate into practical suspension of TPQ processes in the plants, the meeting and the debates therein had afforded the national leadership an opportunity to explain the union's position to all the shop stewards present. The NEC's refusal to endorse the process also deprived it (TPQ) of the legitimacy it required to succeed. One of the least mentioned consequences of the suspension is that, although it failed to stop TPQ, it certainly succeeded in slowing it down considerably.

But the most important lessons that the parties learnt out of the suspension of TPQ can be summarised as follows:

Firstly, the branch and national leadership of the union learnt that no matter how 'correct' an NEC decision may be, such a decision must be one which enjoys the support of the shop stewards and the rank and file membership, particularly when the matter which is being decided upon affects those shop stewards and members directly.[66] Failure by the national leadership to seek the support of these lower levels of its leadership and membership opens it up to charges of being undemocratic and bureaucratic. The entrenched culture of democracy and worker control in PPWAWU forced the national leadership to rethink their standpoint on participative management. That is the discussion which follows under "phase two" below.

Secondly, management also realised the importance of gaining credibility for the process, and although they would not admit it at first, they later realised that the failure to consult and negotiate issues with the union had deprived them of success.[67] Thus it so happened that while the union was rethinking its own position on TPQ, the company was also going through a similar process, so that when they met to start discussions in late 1991 both sides came with different attitudes to each other and the change process.

Thirdly, while the union and management positions were undergoing some change, many workers and shop stewards were also taking stock of what the process had achieved. This had been forced upon many of them by the failure of the process to deliver tangible results and accounted for the transformation in attitudes and views discussed under "phase two" below.

5.2 Phase Two: Worker Rejection versus A Union Rethink

The stalemate that had resulted from the formal decision of PPWAWU to suspend its participation in TPQ processes at PG Bison did not last for long. As indicated above management immediately went on the offensive and tried to recover lost ground by convincing workers in the various plants that the process was in the interests of the workers themselves. Joseph Mthembu (Mdluli), a full-time shop steward at PG Bison Germiston and chairperson of the Wits branch of the union pointed to some of the problems the union faced at plant level after the suspension:

> (W)hat happened is that most of the workers did not accept the suspension. They went ahead. So, us as the shop stewards also went ahead with what had already started within our company because some [workers] asked us who gave us the mandate to go and suspend the whole process because no one had mandated us to do that. Because to them it was something which was nice which came from management....Therefore it was suspended verbally to be honest, ...because Christo Nel went around the country to talk to workers and shop stewards and then that's where it was found that no one is prepared to accept the suspension of the thing.[68]

It was the tension between the national union position, on the one hand, and that of the majority of its members and shop stewards in the workplaces, on the other that forced the union to reconsider it approach to management-initiated participation programmes at PG

Bison. Sipho Kubheka, the union's general secretary at the time, pointed to the dilemma facing the union following the rejection of the union's position by its membership.

> (T)he question of stopping (processes like TPQ) is a non-starter because this thing is in motion...When management is talking to workers in the factories, telling them about these grand ideas, workers understand these ideas as well, but not in the sense of a response from a trade unionist kind of position. When they respond they respond favourably to it. Now, if then as an organisation you say this should be halted you would find that you are in conflict with the members in this situation.[69]

Both Mthembu (Mdluli) and Kubheka's comments above indicate that the workers' initial response to TPQ was favourable because management was promising all the 'nice' things to the workers - racial equality, training, improved wages and working conditions, etc. This should not come as a surprise because after all, the workers' struggle was about demands for these things. To many workers it appeared as if management had at last seen the light and was ready to concede to the workers' demands. From this point of view the union's call for a boycott appeared to be an unreasonable attempt to block a workers' victory. No unionist could convince the workers otherwise.

Thus Kubheka's comment above points to a turning point in union policy, at the national level, towards management-initiated participation programmes. However, this change became a very gradual process which was also hampered by what Kubheka has termed the "key hampering problem areas", namely, capacity, resources and know-how.[70] A more detailed discussion on lack of capacity in the union follows in chapter 5 of this study. Suffice it to say here that since the early 1990s PPWAWU has engaged in a number of activities to try and address these shortcomings. In particular, the union has drawn a lot from the expertise, advice and resources of the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand in trying to understand the issues and develop a more co-ordinated response.[71] However, the national union's approach has remained a reactive one which tries to respond to specific programmes in specific companies. Welcome Ntshangase, a former national education officer in the union who is now working as a 'continuous improvement officer' at Nampak head office[72], agreed that the union was reactive but argued that it was a learning process for them:

> (F)irst and foremost our response has been reactive because we have been bombarded left and right by these schemes, the TPQs, the TQMs, the in-house change process, whatever. Our response in the past wasn't very much co-ordinated, which was not a mistake. I mean we were trying to find our footing.[73]

Indeed the way in which the union's policy has been evolving, particularly at the national level does indicate that the union has been trying to 'find its footing'. Although no concrete programme has emerged Ntshangase argued that three principles had come to underpin the union's involvement in all participation programmes. These are that participation should guarantee job security to PPWAWU members, it should lead to stronger or greater worker participation or worker control and finally, that it should ensure that workers benefit in terms of the living wage.[74] In addition, union leaders have maintained that participation should not be a separate process from collective bargaining. Although the above 'principles' may suggest that the union had at last arrived at a position, there is no evidence to show that it was officially adopted as union policy. The union's NEC never adopted any policy position on this issue, but what may have happened is that national officials may have adopted the 'principles' as some kind of yardstick by which to measure the performance of participation programmes introduced by companies. But what is interesting about these principles is the fact that they take account of the concerns and aspirations of workers on the shopfloor. They also reflect the degree of consensus that has been achieved in the union on how to respond to participatory management. But most importantly these principles give more substance to the notion of 'becoming centrally involved' which was advocated in an earlier discussion paper by two PPWAWU unionists.[75] As such they could be the basis of a South African model of how unions should respond to participatory management in particular, and workplace change in general.

Meanwhile, communication remained poor between the head office, on the one hand, and union branches and factory structures, on the other, as to the direction to follow. Branch and local officials were left to their own devices and, in many cases, these officials adopted a pragmatic approach which accepted the reality that members wanted participation but stopped short of committing the entire union to a position. Mlindi Mthethwa, a former local organiser in Johannesburg responsible for Nampak Polyfoil who has since joined Nampak as a

'continuous improvement officer'[76], said that at first he was opposed to the change process because he feared that it was an attempt to 'neutralise the strength of the workers'. But he later changed his position and accepted the change process because,

> (A)s time went it was clear that for me as an organiser to reject it was going to be a problem because the majority of the shop stewards were for this process. And also the workers....it was clear that the workers want this thing, they want change.[77]

But Mthethwa's conversion was not because of a policy or guidelines from the national office. Lack of direction from the head office and other national structures forced him to look for direction elsewhere:

> I was guided by the views of the people on the ground and....just consultations at branch level because there was nothing in place in the union to actually say 'this is the weapon we are giving you to deal with the change process'. There wasn't any policy decision to say, 'this is our policy in dealing with this problem'.[78]

What emerges from the above is that realities on the ground, in other words, pressures from the membership forced the union (at national, branch and local levels) to reconsider its position of non-involvement. In the case of PG Bison, the suspension of involvement in TPQ by the national union was ended during a round of wage negotiations in 1991 when the shop stewards agreed with management to resume discussions on the matter. The national organiser present in the negotiations, who was still on probation at the time, simply went along with the decision without first getting a go ahead from national structures. Similarly, organisers like Mthethwa operating at the local took their cue from the workers and shop stewards and became involved once again. Thus the union at the higher levels had been forced to reconsider its position.

Meanwhile the workers were involved in the processes and were still waiting for the delivery of tangible results. In time they were also going to be forced by different circumstances to reconsider their own attitudes to participation programmes. But before addressing the factors which led to such a rethink on the part of the workers, a brief discussion of the response of

workers at Nampak Polyfoil to their company's change process is pertinent.

The background to the introduction of the change process at Nampak Polyfoil has been discussed earlier in this chapter. An important difference between Nampak Polyfoil and PG Bison is that at the former the process came much later at a time when the union was already reconsidering its hardline attitude. Important lessons had already been learnt at PG Bison. Thus even though some in the branch and national leadership were still suspicious of the intentions of management, no efforts were made to block the process or to discourage the members from getting involved. The local organiser was part of change process discussions from the start, but still there were no policy guidelines from the national union office. But the fact that the change process came at a different phase of the evolution of union response to participation is not the only factor that accounts for the union's involvement at Polyfoil. An additional factor is that the proposal from management to start a change process came when the parties were locked in a struggle over regular disruptions of production through strikes and stayaways and management's threat to discipline the entire workforce. The strikes had become a feature of workplace relations since unionisation of the workforce in the early 1980s. Polyfoil was one of the most militant factories in Nampak, with most of the strikes arising out of disciplinary and grievance cases, wages, centralised bargaining (the national strike in 1990) and COSATU-initiated actions like the LRA and anti-VAT stayaways in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. However, the final straw for management was the workers' strong response to the anti-VAT general strike in 1991. They threatened to discipline the entire workforce. But a standoff developed when the workers refused to attend individual disciplinary hearings and instead demanded a mass hearing for everybody on one charge. The change process came as a mutually acceptable resolution to the dispute and at the time the union on the shopfloor was in a strong position as all the workers were united behind the union and so the shopfloor leadership could see no harm that could possibly result from the change process.

The first meeting in Rustenburg where the change process was discussed also held 'value sharing workshops' where management, the shop stewards and the union official tried to agree on a set of values which form the basis of change and worker participation in the workplace. The workshop happened at the end of 1991 at the time of CODESA (the Convention for a

Democratic South Africa) and was therefore nicknamed a 'CODESA'. Back in the factory smaller workshops which became known as 'little CODESAs' were again run for the entire workforce to get their input on the values. The discussions reached a deadlock on the question of participation and the values were never finalised. From there the parties agreed to set up a number of committees comprising shop stewards and management representatives to resolve outstanding issues and to work out the way forward for the change process.

The response of the union members to the change process was positive. None of them raised any opposition or objection at the time. As one worker recalled, "At first we were excited (about the change process)".[79] What had helped to give legitimacy to the process was the perception among the workforce that the process had been negotiated with their shop stewards. The majority of union members (90%) said that management had first negotiated with their shop stewards before implementing the change process. It is therefore not surprising that the workers went into the process without raising objections given that they had a lot of confidence in their shop stewards. Almost 94% of union members said they were satisfied that their shop stewards were working according to the wishes of the workers. Thus after the 'little CODESAs' the workers waited patiently for the change process to start delivering results. But the union remained the vehicle for the workers' involvement in the process. This is in contrast to PG Bison where shop stewards became alienated from their constituency and were perceived by many workers as 'sell-outs'.

The response among the shop stewards was mixed, with a minority of them suspicious of the process from the start. But this minority happened to be those shop stewards who were very popular and influential in the factory. One of the sceptics among the shop stewards explained his reasons,

> Even though they (management) are stating that this change process will also benefit everybody, we believe that the bigger share will go to the management whereas the majority of the people who are contributing to the wealth of this company will be left penniless. And we know of a structure that was called TPQ. I personally only heard a little bit of that story.[80]

The fears of those shop stewards who were suspicious of the process were therefore that its objective was to increase worker motivation and thus improve productivity without any real benefits for the workers. Secondly, they feared that it would cause tensions among union members and destroy the unity that had been built in struggle. But others saw certain benefits and opportunities in the change process. As one shop steward put it,

> We saw the change process as empowerment of the workers on the shopfloor so that each worker could have enough decision-making powers and control over the work they do.[81]

The committees which had been established took long to conclude the issues they had been set up to debate. The problem, however, was not so much that the committees took long to conclude their work. Rather it was the fact that the entire process, particularly the committees, was putting severe strains on the resources of the shop stewards and the union. The shop stewards became overwhelmed with work in the committees and found it almost impossible to perform their union duties. This demonstrated the limitation of union capacity to engage in restructuring programmes and the problem of relying on shop stewards alone to represent workers on all issues - from negotiating wages and conditions, defending workers in disciplinary cases, taking up workers' grievances, and representing workers in restructuring programmes. One shop steward recalled the reasons leading to the suspension of the process and the dilemma they faced as a committee:

> So, what happened as we had meetings after meetings, whenever we had a problem in the management and shop stewards meetings this guy (from management) will come up and say, 'why don't we elect a committee that will look directly into that problem?'. Comrade, time went on. We ended up having eleven committees. And most of the shop stewards were involved in some of those committees and when we looked at this thing, comrade, we saw that it was now creating problems....I mean, we can't be having eleven committees. And then, it seemed as if by that time the union wasn't functioning the way it used to. At the same time there are also (disciplinary and grievance) cases and most of the time a shop steward, when he is supposed to go to a case, he is busy in another meeting - planning meeting, steering committee, task force, what-what committee, canteen committee. Hey, there were a lot of committees. And then we decided that it [change process] should be suspended. However, there were hard feelings among the committee members.[82]

But the suspension of the process at Polyfoil was not because of a directive from the national union. It came after a debate within the shop stewards committee and among the workers. When the anti-change process lobby in the shop stewards committee failed to win the debate, two of these shop stewards who were in senior positions (chairperson and secretary) resigned and went to the workforce to give their reasons. They explained to the workers that they were becoming unaccountable to their constituency and that the work of the union was suffering because the time of the shop stewards was taken up by commitments in numerous committees of the change process. They also argued that the change process was not delivering, that management was not prepared to give an unequivocal commitment to worker participation and the values of the process had not been agreed. Finally, they then appealed to the workers to agree to a suspension of the change process so that the union could carry on with its normal work.[83] On that platform they won the debate and the majority of the workers suspended the process.

The decision of the workers forced management to go back to the drawing board because they had nothing tangible by which to attract the workers back into the process. It took a year before they came up with new proposals for setting up work teams ('natural working teams') which had some autonomy to take decisions on job-related matters. Meanwhile, the workers did not close the door to further discussions on the change process, but they put some conditions. The values, particularly the issue of worker participation, had to be agreed and finalised first and clear principles had to be set out for the process. For examples, they were demanding a flattening of the management hierarchy by removing supervisors and appointed team leaders, and that the teams should elect their own leaders amongst their own members.[84]

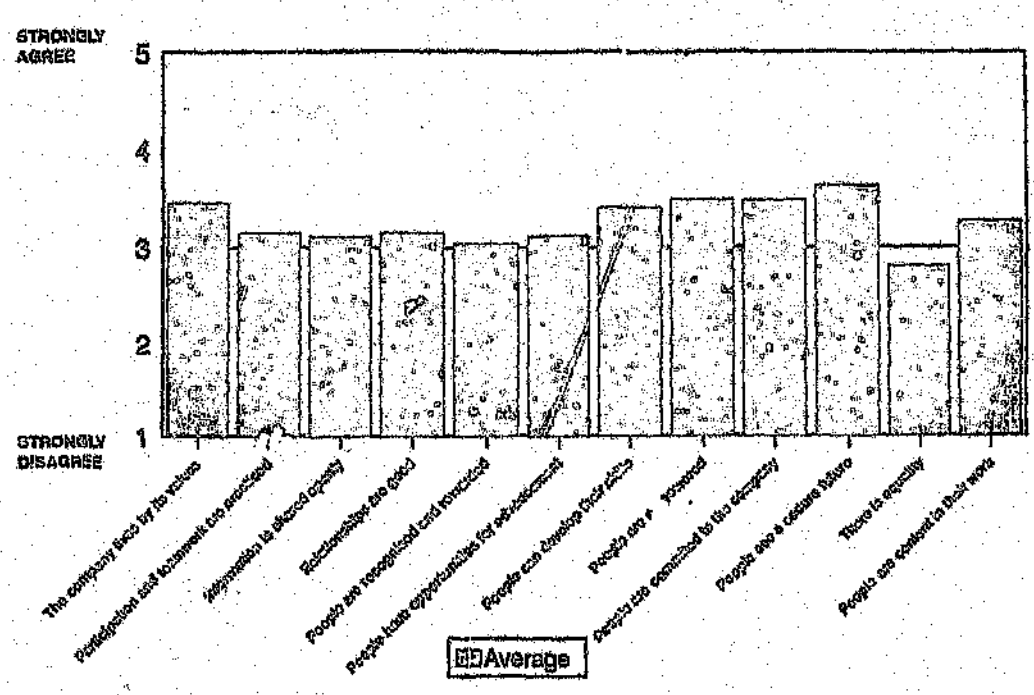
At about the same time as Nampak Polyfoil workers were debating whether or not to suspend the change process, a similar debate was taking place at PG Bison in Piet Retief. The PG Bison workers had taken much longer - three years - to get to that point. Part of the explanation is that all the shop stewards were in favour of TPQ and were therefore not keen to start such a debate. Unlike their counterparts at Nampak Polyfoil, they had neglected their union structures and instead pinned their hopes on TPQ and its structures. Accounts given by workers seem to indicate that the shop stewards were beginning to display different class

interests and aspirations to those of their constituency and that they had ceased being the voice of the workers at the factory. In the words of a recently elected shop steward these shop stewards "allowed themselves to become friends with management [*abangane homqhashi*]".[85] This is in contrast to the situation at Polyfoil where shop stewards remained the voice of their constituents. But more importantly, the union membership at PG Bison, which had never been strongly organised, was in disarray and did not have the strength and power easily to challenge what was a national process. The hope continued to exist that the process, as directed by the national forum at national level, might start to deliver. But by the end of 1992 these hopes had been dashed as the waiting had been too long and the workers' patience had run out. The process had failed to bear results, the management style had remained unchanged, worker participation failed to materialise and the shop stewards were seen as sell-outs who had become conduits for "new rules to oppress the workforce".[86] An attitude survey commissioned by the PG Bison national forum in 1992 came out with very interesting findings regarding workers' perceptions of TPQ in particular, and change in general. The survey took a sample of 800 out of the company's 4 000 employees at the time, across all grades (including management). The survey, which gave a national profile of the group as well as profiles of the individual plants included in the survey, showed results which were "above midpoint, but not by much".[87] Unfortunately the results were averages based on the aggregate responses by workers and managers and did not give a clear indication of the attitudes of the workers alone. But the report did make an important point that,

> On every issue, managers said they feel the company is doing better than workers say the company is doing. There is a clear difference in perception between workers and management. The difference is greatest on the issue of empowerment. Managers clearly agree that people are empowered, whereas workers are far less certain that people are empowered.[88]

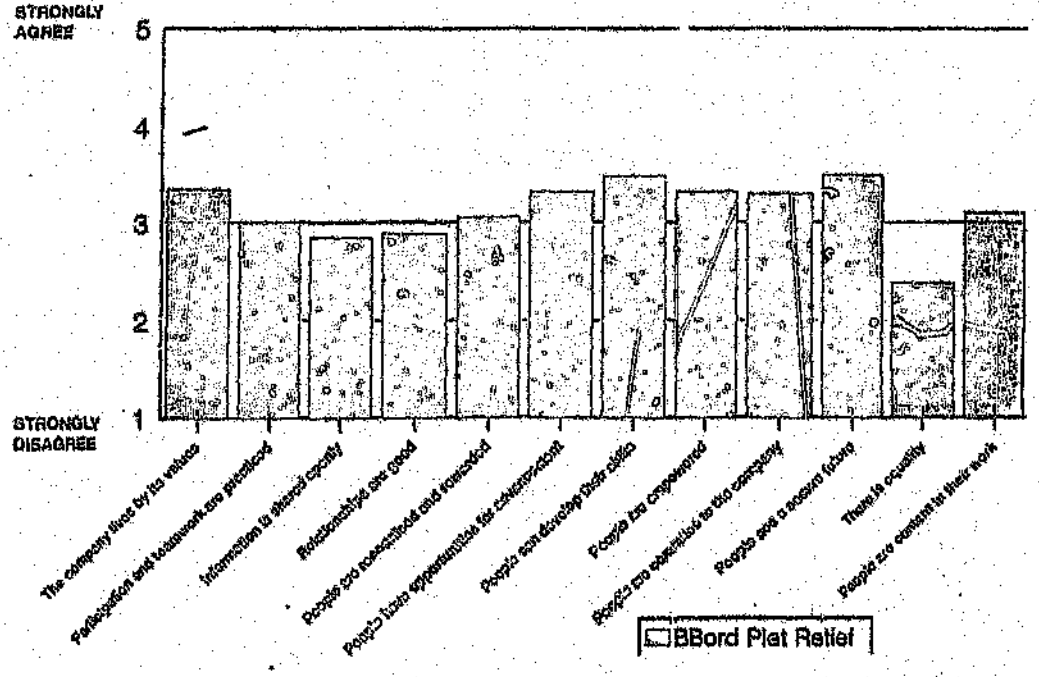
Table 6 below shows the overall results for the group while Table 7 shows the results of Piet Retief.

TABLE 6: PG BISON RESULTS - OVERALL PROFILE:



Source: Report on the PG Bison Group Attitude Survey, October 1992.

TABLE 7: BISONBORD PIET RETIEF - AVERAGE PROFILE:



Source: Report on the PG Bison Group Attitude Survey, October 1992.

It can be seen that the results from Piet Retief are more negative than those of the entire group. It is not surprising therefore that in October 1992 a general meeting of the Piet Retief workforce took a decision to stop their delegates from attending a national forum meeting in Johannesburg and to stop their involvement in TPQ. Minutes of that national forum included a brief reference to the Piet Retief problem and indicated the course of action approved to resolve it:

> The Bisonbord Piet Retief shop stewards boycotted the Forum and suspended worker participation in TPQ processes due to specific grievances in Piet Retief. At the Forum, union members said the Steering Committee should visit Piet Retief and report on the situation there. This was approved.[89]

One worker summed up the problem they were facing as follows:

> It (TPQ) made the shop stewards weak and made them to work for management. At some stage the union nearly collapsed here because they were not doing their job. At election time we removed them.[90]

The above statement points to the recourse workers have if their shopfloor leadership fails to perform their duties satisfactorily. The PPWAWU constitution provides for a two-year term of office (formerly one) for shop stewards, but each shop steward is subject to recall before the expiry of that term.[91] These regular elections give workers power to recall any shop steward whose performance is unsatisfactory. However, workers seldom use the power to recall a shop steward in mid-term and instead wait until the expiry of his/her term to remove him or her. In Piet Retief too the workers decided to wait for new elections where new workers were elected to replace the old committee.[92] In the case of one shop steward, the chairperson of the outgoing committee, the workers decided to take more drastic steps because they believed that he was too close to management and did not show any remorse for having 'sold out'. To make matters worse he went to work during a work stayaway called by COSATU in 1993 in defiance of a decision taken by the entire union membership. He was subsequently expelled from the union. A few months later he was dismissed by management for theft of company property and the union membership and their shop stewards refused to represent or defend

him.[53] All these steps were taken by the workers themselves without the involvement of the union branch in the area and they demonstrate the power of workers and their ability to exercise democratic control of their union on the shopfloor.

The research for this project, including the survey of union members at both PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil, was done during this phase of the evolution of the union's response to participatory management.

5.3 Phase Three: The Emerging Consensus: 'Becoming Centrally Involved'

The above discussion reveals an important aspect regarding the evolution of union policy towards management-initiated worker participation programmes. It shows both sides to the debate, rank and file workers, on the one hand, and branch and national leadership, on the other, gradually moving towards mature responses which take account of the harsh realities of their situations. The difference is that the branch and national union leadership shifted gradually from a hardline position of non-involvement towards a more pragmatic one while the workers shifted from ready and unquestioning acceptance towards a more hardline and sceptical position.

However, the above observation needs to be qualified by pointing out that while the workers have made this shift they still remain open to consider involvement in a participatory process at the workplace if they are satisfied that it will bring about real improvements to their working lives. Thus it would seem that their rejection of participation was not a blanket refusal but rather a rejection of what they considered to be a distorted and inadequate form of participation which offered very little benefit. This emerged from interviews with shop stewards and in the results of the survey. Asked whether the workers wanted to participate in company decision-making, a PG Bison shop steward replied:

> Yes, but that must be genuine participation. It must happen. That we want. We would like to see our firm operate and be successful where everybody would work in harmony. What we are against is apartheid and discrimination.[54]

Then, responding to the question, 'Would you accept the in-a-groups if the system was implemented fairly, where workers would have a say in decisions around their jobs? Or would you reject it out of hand?', he responded,

> When I look at it, if you remove the name 'in-a-group', my team and I, before we start work, are able to meet and discuss work plans and problems and allocate workers to different tasks. We do not want a situation where the one person has a right ' tell others but they are not able to tell him. That is the democracy we want, co-operation among the workers. We have no problem with that as long as it is not going to work against us. *What we reject is something that is going to work against us.*[95] (Italics added for emphasis)

A Nampak Polyfoil shop steward also pointed out that the workers rejected the change process because they felt that their participation in the process was a "waste of time" because it offered no meaningful participation to them and because management refused to commit themselves to a genuine form of participation that would be negotiated with the workers:

> To us this discussion process conducted by ITISA appeared as a strategy to try and co-opt us....So we got to a point where we had to suspend the process until management came out clearly on what they mean about this change process. What change they want to implement. So we took the ball into their court and said since management was always rejecting our proposals, management must come up with a proposal of the change process they want to introduce that would please everybody.[96]

The situation in both factories points to some of the complexities that have faced workers as they grapple with changes in the workplace. The study reveals a strong yearning for change among all workers. This change is in relation to all the problems and aspirations of workers including improvement to wages and conditions, the desire to participate in decisions, the demand to be treated fairly and with respect, and the desire to free themselves from racial discrimination. The desire for change among workers is similar to the what Goodrich observed in British workplace politics in the early 1920s, namely, "the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not to be controlled at all and the demand to take a hand in controlling".[97] However, as will be argued in chapter 4, in Nampak and PG Bison's case, this demand for change falls short of what Goodrich termed "the demand not to be controlled at all". The suspension of the processes did not negate these desires and aspirations. On the

contrary, it was precisely because workers wanted to see real changes, and the change processes failed to bring these about, that they took the decisions they did. A Nampak Polyfoil shop steward captured this view very cogently in an interview,

> There must be changes in the factory. There are changes all over the world. Even at home there are changes, wherever you are there must be change. But now the changes come in a wrong way then, management come and discuss things and say that and that. The workers are down there on the floor. We can discuss whatever we want for the whole year, but as long as it does not apply there on the floor, nothing will help.[98]

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the change processes were rejected by the workforce not because they are opposed to change. Indeed, there is all the evidence that workers at Nampak Polyfoil and PG Bison wanted change desperately (see Chapter 4 for a further discussion). The workers were promised change and sat through endless 'bosberade' and discussions but none of these promises and debates translated into visible change 'down there on the floor'. The few changes that were implemented seemed to be those that, in the opinion of the workers, worked against the workforce, for example, multi-tasking, in-a-groups to send more instructions to workers, meetings which tied shop stewards to endless and fruitless discussions with the result that the union was not functioning properly.

Thus, it can be argued that although the workers and the higher leadership of the union had reached seemingly contradictory positions in response to worker participation, their experiences had brought them to a stage where opportunities for consensus were much greater than ever before. Conditions had been created for a more mature debate where both sides were able to acknowledge each others' point of view. The emerging consensus is based on the following:

a) Both the workers on the shopfloor and branch and national leadership in the union agree on the need for greater participation of workers in decision-making in their enterprises.

b) The workers realise that the union remains a key institution to further their interests at the workplace and that the union as a national body plays a key role in building the solidarity of all workers at all levels. The union, on the other hand, acknowledges that workers in the workplace are its base and that no decisions about the workplace can succeed unless it has the backing of the workers themselves.

c) Both sides acknowledge that management always has its agenda and this agenda always underlies any new programme that it introduces to workers and the union. This agenda never puts the interests of workers first, therefore it is imperative for workers and their union to have a clear agenda of their own before engaging management on new issues.

d) Involvement in any new management initiative should be preceded by negotiation where both sides (union/workers and management) put their proposals on the table and debate them like they do on collective bargaining issues.

e) Finally, it would seem that there is a consensus that no separation should be drawn between worker participation and collective bargaining issues. Recent trends in the union show that collective bargaining structures have been used to negotiate worker participation, and that where possible, such issues become incorporated in collective bargaining processes at the workplace level and nationally.[29] This however, does not mean that unions have started seriously to engage management on the content of worker participation. Rather the engagement has been around processes to be adopted and structures to be established. For example, at Nampak the shop stewards began to engage management on the issue of participation. But this was only to discuss which structures and procedures were appropriate. On the issue of participation per se the parties reached a deadlock which they were never able to resolve.

Ntshangase and Solomons (1993) argued that the best option for the union was to become "centrally involved" in management initiated participation programmes. This involvement, which they termed "adversarial participation" is a strategic move where the union develops its own approach and uses existing collective bargaining structures and mechanisms to negotiate

the best possible deal for its own members. In suggesting this approach they were conscious of the dangers of contradictory approaches by the national union on the one hand, and its membership on the shopfloor, on the other. Theirs can be seen as simultaneously an attempt to develop a new approach to worker participation as well as to find the basis for a consensus in the union which would help avoid the tensions between the leaders and members which characterised the early period. The stage which the union has reached and the debates that continue to rage closely approximate what Ntshangase and Solomons suggested in their paper. However, the union still has a long way to go. For example, although current practice reflects this consensus, the union still avoids placing the matter on the agenda of its national structures for a formal policy to be taken. This could be out of fear that such a policy may not be an appropriate one and may therefore be rejected by the workers. The other reasons seems to be lack of strategic thinking and weak co-ordination by the union's head office. Meanwhile new challenges, like developing capacity in the union to tackle these issues and the debate on the workplace forums,[100] have come up. An assessment of the union's ability to meet these challenges will follow in chapter 5.

ENDNOTES:

1. In the printing industry the South African Typographical Union (SATU), formed as a craft union at the turn of the century, had a closed shop with the employers which compelled workers in the industry to belong to it for as long as they were employed in the industry. Similarly, the National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers (NUFAW), also formerly a craft union, had a closed shop with the furniture employers.

2. As a result the union's registration in 1981 only covered pulp and paper manufacturing in the Eastern Cape, Northern Natal and East Rand regions where the first paper mills organised were located.

3. Fine, A. and Webster, E. (1989) "Transcending Traditions: Trade unions and political unity", in South African Research Service (1989) South African Review 5, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 261.

4. The 1995 membership figure shows an unprecedented growth in the union. Part of this growth is accounted for by the opening up of new areas since the dismantling of the bantustans and also by greater attention that the union has paid to organising in old areas. However, it should be borne in mind that about 8 000 of this figure is made up of forestry workers who have, since 1994, been transferred to the new farm and forestry affiliate of COSATU, the South African Agricultural, Plantation and Allied Workers' Union (SAAPAWU).

5. These figures are from Baskin, J. (1991) Striking Back: A History of COSATU, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 55.

6. In 1994 the union agreed to hand over its forestry membership to COSATU's new farmworkers union. The new union, called the South African Agriculture, Plantation and Allied Workers' Union (SAAPAWU) was launched in February 1995.

7. The largest affiliate of COSATU, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), had just over 300 000 members in 1994, while the second largest, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA) had more than 160 000 members. Medium-size unions have in the region of 80 000 to 120 000 and the rest, those below 80 000 are small in COSATU terms. However, a union of similar size to PPWAWU would be considered large in other federations in South Africa.

8. See Webster, E. (1987) "The Workplace in a Changing South Africa: A Sociological Perspective", in The Contribution of Social Work In South Africa. Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Conference, 6 - 7 July 1987.

9. Webster, E. (1985) Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 150.

10. Maller (1992) noted four reasons which had motivated management in South Africa to initiate participative management. These reasons, which overlap with those discussed in

this section are, a) the desire to improve productivity in conditions of economic crisis, b) attempts to increase worker loyalty to the company and reduce conflict and confrontation at a time when unions had grown in strength, c) the need to tap workers' formal and tacit skills as well as their initiative capacities to improve product quality and productivity, and d) the need to rescue free enterprise as apartheid was being abandoned. (see Maller, J. (1992) Conflict and Co-operation: Case Studies in Worker Participation, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 8).

11. see Lloyd, C. (1994) Work Organisation and World Class Management: A Critical Guide, Johannesburg: Red Earth Publications/SALB, p. 38.

12. This view was expressed by some delegates at a meeting between PPWAWU shop stewards and organisers, and PG Bison management in Broederstroom, 20 - 21 August 1990. It is also supported by developments in both the PG Bison and Nampak groups where union and political activists have been targeted for recruitment as part of an image change drive.

13. Nel, C. (1990) Labour Relations in the '90s", IPM Journal, September 1990, pp. 12 - 13.

14. Interview with Loutjie de Jongh, general manager, Nampak Polyfoil, 7 October 1993.

15. Nampak Limited, Annual Report 1994, p. 29. See also SWOP/PPWAWU (1994) Restructuring at Nampak: A Strategy for Worker Involvement for a detailed background on Nampak and its divisions.

16. SWOP and PPWAWU have just completed a detailed study of the group and its strategy of world class manufacturing and service entitled Restructuring at Nampak: A Strategy for Worker Involvement (November 1994). The study also compares Nampak to its counterparts overseas.

17. Interview with Sydwell Qomoyi, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

18. Interview with Beljium Makhabane, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 Novembe 1993.

19. Interview with Stuart Bigmore, Operations Manager, November, 1993. 12 October 1993.

20. Nampak Limited, Annual Report, 1994, p. 21.

21. Interview with Worker No. 14, Nampak Polyfoil.

22. Interview with Worker No. 27, Nampak Polyfoil.

23. Interview with Loutjie de Jongh, General Manager, Nampak Polyfoil, 7 October 1993.

24. Interview with Worker No. 21, Nampak Polyfoil.

25. Interview with Worker No. 26, Nampak Polyfoil.

26. Interview with Themba Tiya, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

27. Interviews with Themba Tiya and Zimi Masuku, shop steward committee secretary and chairperson respectively, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

28. Vusi Khumalo, the Continuous Improvement Manager, explained that teams are the structures "where people have the opportunity of debating issues, discussing issues and participating in deciding about issues that affect them directly in their work stations." The General Manager, Loutjie de Jongh added that only management had the ability and skills to take higher decisions, like buying new machinery: "I don't think they (workers) have the ability to make that decision. And I don't know what the good is of asking the people [workers] anyway." (Both interviewed at Nampak Polyfoil, October/November 1993).

29. These operations are broken down as follows: 5 factories, 9 PG Bison Metro Distribution centre, 13 PG Wood distribution centres and 10 Timber City centres. PG Bison also owns the Penny Pinchers timber distribution chain which has stores in most big centres nationally.

30. Interview with Jim Smith, Communications Manager, PG Bison, 28 November 1994.

31. 'Formica' is the material which PG Bison manufactures at PG Bison Laminates, Alrode, to make durable decorative surfaces which are then laminated onto particle board.

32. PG Bison, 'The Nature of Our Business', brochure, 1994.

33. The term 'manufacturing operation' refers to a factory as opposed to a distribution centre like PG Wood which sells the company's products. The other manufacturing operations in the group are in Stellenbosch, Pietermaritzburg, Boksburg and Alrode (Laminates).

34. Interview with Andries Fakude, shop steward, PG Bison, 11 February 1994.

35. Interview with D. Shoyisa, operator, Forming and Pressing, Line 1, PG Bison Piet Retief.

36. Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) (1993), July 1993, p. 27.

37. The trip to Lusaka, Zambia, by several prominent business people in 1985 was part of an attempt to open lines of communication with an organisation which many saw as the next government after the fall of apartheid. Later a number of liberal business leaders formed the Consultative Business Movement (CBM) to represent those businesses which were in Restructuring and Proposed Redundancies at PG Bison: A Report to PPWAWU favour of some changes in the political situation of the country. PG Bison was one of the companies represented in the CBM.

38. These values are contained in a booklet entitled PG Bison Values and Statement of Objectives (1991).

39. The SWOP investigation earlier in 1993 also observed that TPQ at those workplaces which had been investigated had "collapsed almost completely", the only exception being literacy classes in a few workplaces like Piet Retief. See SWOP (1993) op. cit., pp. 19 - 20.

40. See Ntshangase, W. and Solomons, A. (1993) "Adversarial Participation: A Union Response to Participatory Management", in SA Labour Bulletin, vol. 17, No. 4, 1993.

41. Interview with Joseph Mthembu (Mdluli), 21 June 1994.

42. See PG Bison's Values and Statement of Objectives, 1991.

43. IPM Journal (1989) "Leon Cohen at PG Bison", (interview), IPM Journal, July 1989, p. 14.

44. Interview with Simon Dlamini, shop steward, PG Bison, Piet Retief, 12 February 1994.

45. Interview with Andries Fakude, chairperson of the shop stewards committee, PG Bison, Piet Retief, 11 February 1994.

46. Interview with Andries Fakude.

47. Interview with worker No. 34, PG Bison.

48. Interview with Simon Dlamini.

49. Natal Spur is a conference centre near Paulpietersburg where management and shop stewards often held their TPQ meetings.

50. Interview with worker No. 32.

51. Interview with Shadrack Mnisi, shop steward, PG Bison, Piet Retief, 11 February 1994.

52. Interview with Andries Fakude.

53. Interview with Shadrack Mnisi.

54. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, former PPWAWU general secretary, 28 November 1994.

55. Minutes of PPWAWU NEC, 10 - 12 November 1989, Orlando, Johannesburg.

56. Minutes of PPWAWU NEC, 10 - 12 November 1989.

57. Minutes of PPWAWU NEC, 10 - 12 November 1989. The most high-profile figures the union was concerned about were Murphy Morobe, then Publicity Secretary of the UDF and a leading figure in the mass democratic movement who had been recruited by PG Bison to work on TPQ, and Joe Mokoena, an ex-PPWAWU national organiser who was working for ITISA (Interdependence and Transformation in South Africa), PG Bison's

chief consultants on TPQ.

58. At the time when these debates were taking place at the NEC the chairperson of the PG Bison, Piet Retief, shop stewards committee, Cornelius Sibeko, was also a delegate at the NEC. But what seems to have been happening is that Sibeko did not convey the full report from the NEC. This was confirmed by a recently elected shop steward who was a rank and file union member at the time: "Our head office was taking decisions and sending them to workers here. But the shop stewards did nothing about those." [Interview with Shadrack Mnisi, 11 February 1994].

59. Minutes of PPWAWU NOBC, 27 January 1990.

60. Minutes of PPWAWU NOBC meeting, 27 January 1990.

61. Minutes of PPWAWU NEC, 18 - 20 May 1990, Soweto.

62. Minutes of PPWAWU NEC, 18 - 20 May 1990.

63. Minutes of PG Bison National Shop Stewards Meeting, 20 - 21 August 1990, Alpha Conference Centre, Broederstroom.

64. Interview with Joseph Mthembu (Mdluli), PPWAWU full-time shop steward at PG Bison, 21 June 1994.

65. Interview with Andries Fakude.

66. Interview with Themba Mfeka, Assistant General Secretary, PPWAWU, 23 January 1995.

67. PG Bison management has not come out publicly to acknowledge failure of TPQ because of lack of proper consultation with the union. However, when the TPQ process was revived in 1994 the company went out of its way to draft a discussion document entitled "Employee Participation in Decision-making Within PG Bison: A Discussion Paper" which has been used as a basis for discussions and negotiations with the union on the subject. The document is part of attempts to negotiate the issue from scratch. In a way this is an acknowledgement that unless worker participation is negotiated with the union the process is bound to be short-lived.

68. Interview with Joseph Mdluli (Mthembu), 21 June 1994.

69. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, former general secretary of PPWAWU, now an official based at the head office of the union, 28 November 1994.

70 Interview with Sipho Kubheka.

71. The assistance which SWOP has been giving to PPWAWU includes workshops for shop stewards and officials, consultations, assistance in research projects at both PG Bison and Nampak and a Trade Union Fellowship programme for two unionists to conduct research

on worker participation schemes under the supervision of SWOP staff.

72. For details on Ntshangase and other officials who have left the union to join management to see chapter 5 of this study.

73. Interview with Welcome Ntshangase, national education officer of PPWAWU, 3 November 1993.

74. Interview with Welcome Ntshangase.

75. See Ntshangase, W. and Solomons A. (1993) op. cit.

76. See Chapter 5 for more details on unionists who have joined Nampak.

77. Interview with Mlindi Mthethwa, PPWAWU local organiser, Johannesburg, 25 November 1993.

78. Interview with Mlindi Mthethwa.

79. Interview with Worker 15, Nampak Polyfoil.

80. Interview with Zimi Masuku, chairperson of the shop stewards committee, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

81. Interview with Sydwell Qomoyi, vice-chairperson of the shop stewards committee, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

82. Interview with Zimi Masuku.

83. Interview with Themba Tiya and Zimi Masuku.

84. Interview with Beljium Makhabane.

85. Interview with Gilbert Malinga, shop steward, PG Bison Piet Retief, 12 February 1994.

86. Interview with Simon Dlamini.

87. Report on the PG Bison Group Attitude Survey, October 1992, p. 5.

88. Ibid., p. 5.

89. PG Bison National Forum Summary Minutes, 18 - 20 October 1992.

90. Interview with Worker No. 25, PG Bison, Piet Retief.

91. PPWAWU Constitution (1993), p. 18.

92. Interview with Shadrack Mnisi.

93. Interview with Andries Fakude, shop steward, PG Bison.

94. Interview with Shadrack Mnisi.

95. Interview with Shadrack Mnisi.

96. Interview with Sydwell Qomoyi.

97. Goodrich C. L. (1920) The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics, London: G. Bell & Sons, p. 37.

98. Interview with Patricia Adams, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

99. Recent examples of this are, the PG Bison Group restructuring exercise in 1993, the co-determination agreement at Carlton Paper, and the restructuring in the Nampak Group.

100. Workplace forums are workplace structures which are in the new Labour Relations Act (1995). Among other things, the forums will facilitate participation by workers in decision-making at the workplace. A forum can only be triggered by a representative union. Unions which initiate the establishment of forums could soon find themselves facing a new challenge of preparing themselves and their membership to engage management on a new terrain which requires enormous resources and capacity in terms of training.

CHAPTER 4:

DEMOCRATISING THE WORKPLACE: WORKER PERSPECTIVES ON INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Solidarity Forever[1]

When the Union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun.
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one?
But the Union makes us strong.

Chorus: Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever!
For the Union makes us strong.

1. Introduction:

The song reproduced above captures the essence of one of the central findings of this study discussed later in this chapter, namely, that there is an extremely strong sense of loyalty to the union among its members. The discussion in Chapter 3 refers to contradictions and tensions among union members on the shopfloor and between rank and file union members, on the one hand, and the union's branch and national leadership, on the other. Statements by workers and shop stewards also refer to difficulties which even threatened to result in the fragmentation and ultimate collapse of the union. However, the union and its members at the two factories covered by this study went through all these difficulties and came out intact. As this chapter will make clear, fragmentation and collapse were avoided because union members at Nampak and PG Bison had learnt one important lesson in their working lives, namely, that "The Union makes us strong". The union is a weapon for defence against abuse and exploitation, and a vehicle to fight for the realisation of the workers' demands and aspirations. Through the union workers build solidarity as a class and develop a vision for the future.

This chapter discusses findings of the research which seem to suggest the emergence of a new vision among workers and shop stewards on the shopfloor. This vision emerged in a context where PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil management had initiated a participatory style of management which, according to management, envisaged a greater role for workers in

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This chapter discusses findings of the research which seem to suggest the emergence of a new vision among workers and shop stewards on the shopfloor. This vision emerged in a context where PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil management had initiated a participatory style of management which, according to management, envisaged a greater role for workers in

decision-making. It had taken workers in the independent trade unions almost 20 years of struggle to get management to a point where it was willing to entertain discussions with workers on issues of control in the workplace.

The independent trade unions were formed more than 20 years ago following the wave of strikes that erupted in 1973, first in Durban, then in other parts of the country. Unlike any other phase of unionisation in the history of black unions in South Africa the phase of unionisation that began in the early 1970s has deepened and the unions have continued to show resilience and have become the pillars of Africa's strongest labour movement. In his study of the development of African trade union in South Africa in the 1970s and the early 1980s, Webster identified three phases in the growth of a trade union, namely, recruitment, winning recognition from management and negotiating and maintaining an agreement that guarantees certain rights to workers in the factories.[2] The problem, according to Webster, is that up until the 1970s unions were not able to move from phase one to phase three mainly due to the failure to win management recognition, and the hostility of the state. He summed this problem up in the following terms:

> What seems to have happened in South Africa is that at each stage in the emergence of embryonic African trade unions, the process of maturation has been ruptured at a crucial point, and the unions have been unable to convert from a temporary into a permanent organisation.[3]

However, the independent unions which emerged in the 1970s have not only been able to move from phase one to phase three, they have also, in the process, managed to consolidate organisation and win for themselves a powerful and permanent position in the workplaces and, indeed, in the economy as a whole. Webster correctly pinpointed the reason for this success by black trade unions:

> For a moment in 1976 - 77 it looked as though the pattern of non-transition to permanent organisation would repeat itself; but the consolidation of monopoly capitalism had given black semi-skilled workers a strategic location in the labour process, and effective shop floor tactics were able to exploit this lever in spite of the obstacles to workplace organisation enumerated in this chapter.[4]

This led Webster to conclude that shop floor struggles by metal workers in the period 1973 - 76 shifted the balance of power and made unionism a 'permanent feature of industry'.[5] Since the mid-1980s th. ..ggles of the independent unions have been about consolidating and deepening their organisation on the shop floor. Not only were these struggles about improving wages and working conditions, but in some cases, the struggles began to pose questions about control of the workplaces, or what Goodrich has termed 'interfering with the employer's business'.[6] The formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985 was one of the most important stages in the process of deepening organisation as the new federation brought together most of the independent unions thus becoming the strongest component of the labour movement in the country. At its inaugural congress in December 1985 COSATU took a resolution on the national minimum wage. Part of the resolution was to,

> Fight to open all the books of every organised company so that workers can see exactly how the wealth they have produced is being wasted and misused by the employers' profit system, and on that basis can demand their full share of the wealth they have produced. Should the wealth not be there, then it will only prove the inefficiency of employer management and strengthen the case for worker control and management of production.[7]

Debates within the labour movement, particularly in COSATU, have always tried to establish a link between the what has been termed 'worker control and management of production' and the struggle for socialism. These debates have tended to see the achievement of worker control of production as the next phase of the trade union struggle at the workplace. As Elijah Barayi, former president of COSATU put it,

> The workers' struggle for socialism has already begun. Finally socialism means workers having control over their own lives. To control our own lives, workers need to control everything that affects our lives. This struggle for control is going on all the time. It is one of the principles of COSATU and is something we fight to deepen and extend every day. Whether it is the mineworkers bringing their wives to the hostels or SAB workers striking because bosses are making a unilateral decision or workers fighting to throw out a rotten leadership in their union or the working class involved in building democratic community structures or whatever - it is all about control. And socialism is about control.[8]

The militancy of workers on the shop floor has served to reinforce calls for greater control on the shop floor. In recent years these calls have taken a concrete form with demands to management to stop unilateral restructuring which almost always leads to retrenchments. As Chapter 3 has shown, it is still difficult to get a coherent union strategy on worker control or industrial democracy.[9] But, in the case of PPWAWU, what is also clear is the fact while the national union leadership has not been able to develop a clear strategy to guide the entire union in responding to participatory management, workers on the shopfloor are debating this issue to find answers. Although these debates have not resulted in a concrete strategy, this study has found elements of a workers' perspective on participation and workplace democratisation which could lay the foundations for a union-wide strategy. In Chapter 3 it has been argued that workers were determined to become involved in deciding a response to management-initiated participatory strategies and that they went so far as to contradict national union policy when the union failed to consult them adequately. This ability to defy the national leadership and contradict national union policy has earned PPWAWU members an influential role in defining strategy on the issue. It would therefore seem plausible to argue that in future, not only will the national union ensure the involvement of its members in deciding strategy, but union members will probably want to ensure that their perspective informs a future union strategy.

The significance of the workers' perspective is threefold. Firstly, it goes beyond process issues and begins to raise questions and make practical suggestions on the content of participation. In other words, workers are not just debating why participation is important and which structures are appropriate to facilitate such participation. They are also debating and defining what meaningful participation is, what issues to participate in, etc. Later in this chapter elements of this perspective are discussed and from these it becomes obvious that the workers' notion of participation (the content of participation) is very different from that of management.

Secondly, the perspective points to the beginning of a new phase of struggle for the union movement, namely, that of trying to influence and change power relations on the shopfloor by focusing on concrete issues and problems over and above wages and conditions of employment.

Thirdly, it shows the extent to which debate among workers themselves has deepened on the issue of control and democracy in the workplace. There is an awareness among workers that they can and should use the power they have acquired in struggles over the years to demand a greater say in decision-making in their companies.

2. Towards a Workers' Perspective of Workplace Democracy

It is important to begin by situating the discussion in the context of capitalist production where relations between workers and capitalists are unequal. Management, as agents of the owners of capital, have the right to plan, direct and control production while workers have to do the actual work of producing goods by combining their labour power with other forces of production. In this case their labour becomes a commodity bought by the capitalist to be used in a way the capitalist sees fit. It is here that Edwards, in his discussion of coordination and control in different forms of social production, locates the question of control and participation in decision-making in capitalist production:

> (T)here is a presumption, indeed a contractual right backed by legal force, for the capitalist, as owner of the purchased labor power, to direct its use. A corollary presumption (again backed by legal force) follows: that the workers whose labor power has been purchased have no right to participate in the conception and planning of production. Coordination occurs in capitalist production as it must inevitably occur in all social production, but it takes the form of top-down co-ordination, for the exercise of which the top (capitalists) must be able to control the bottom (workers). In analysing capitalist production, then, it is more appropriate to speak of control than coordination, although of course, control is a means of coordination.[10]

The question of worker participation and industrial democracy therefore centres around whether or not workers should have the right to 'participate in the conception and planning of production'. It is generally acknowledged in all the literature on this subject that worker participation or industrial democracy or workers' control of industry is a matter that goes beyond what Clegg calls 'pressure group industrial democracy' or 'democracy through collective bargaining'.[11] Debates on worker participation and industrial democracy are concerned about challenging or posing questions about management's right to manage or the so-called prerogative to control and run production.

Clegg identifies two schools of thought in the debate on industrial democracy, namely, the reformists and the revolutionaries. According to this characterisation the reformists argue that industrial democracy could be achieved through various forms of worker participation schemes in management, while revolutionaries believe true industrial democracy can only be achieved once capitalism has been destroyed and replaced by a system of worker self-government.[12] The space available does not permit a more in-depth discussion of the various schools of thought and contributions by other theorists on this subject. Suffice it to say that indications are that in practice issues are not as clear-cut as the above characterisation seems to suggest. In the past debates in COSATU, as the above quotation from their 1985 resolution will show, tended towards a position which saw industrial democracy as an incremental process which was an outcome of ongoing struggles in the workplace. However, there was the notion that an ideal form of industrial democracy could only be achieved under socialism.

The approach adopted in this chapter is one which attempts to piece together workers' perspectives on the subject of industrial democracy or worker participation in factories where management has introduced schemes of worker participation. Instead of giving a 'correct' definition of worker participation or industrial democracy, this chapter has attempted to let the workers themselves define the issues in discussions and interviews.

3. Workers' hopes and suspicions

While the collapse of East European socialism has dampened the enthusiasm of some in the leadership of the labour movement for the idea, workers on the shop floor continue to pose questions around the issue of control in an attempt to push back the frontier of control. The democratisation of politics has given further impetus to these debates among shop floor workers. As one Nampak Polyfoil shop steward put it,

> I'm committed to change because the whole South Africa is changing. Why must we stay like this?[13]

An interesting feature of the factories covered in this study is that both, like most South African factories, have a history of an autocratic management style and racism. Most of the

workers interviewed as part of the samples in both factories recalled a history of racism, unfair dismissals, harassment and poor wages and working conditions. All the workers said they joined the union to fight or to correct one or all these problems. As one Nampak Polyfoil worker explained,

> I joined the union because management was harassing us. So I joined for security and protection. I also wanted to join other workers to fight apartheid at this factory.[14]

In both factories management introduced their experiments in worker participation in a context where the union had won a lot of power for its members and this earned it a great deal of legitimacy and loyalty among the workers. Even at PG Bison where union shopfloor structures were weak the union still had the ability to challenge management and represent workers effectively on a number of issues, like wages, conditions of employment and grievances and disciplinary cases. Where shopfloor structures were ineffective workers could still rely on union branch and national structures to intervene on their behalf. This legitimacy and power of the union derived from the union's effective representation of workers' interests as well as well as the democratic character of union governance and decision-making. By contrast, workers believed that management could not be relied upon to represent or promote their interests. In the eyes of many workers management was the oppressor and exploiter. Zimi Masuku, the chairperson of the Nampak Polyfoil shop stewards committee, was not exaggerating in his comments about union legitimacy among the workers.

> I am confident that workers listen to us and they respect us more than they would listen to whatever management will say. We believe that we do have a direct influence with the workers, and not actually in terms of dictating to them, but if we show them things from our own point of view.[15]

A PG Bison worker expressed the same sentiment in different words:

> My view is that management started TPQ because they saw that they were losing power. So they thought TPQ would satisfy the demands of the workers and stop them from demanding more power.[16]

But in both cases this power by the workers and their union did not constitute a threat to management's right to manage or control production. Why then, did management introduce worker participation? Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes[17] give an explanation which has relevance for understanding why management in South Africa are introducing worker participation. In their research in six British factories, from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s they found that management had opted for a new strategy because of 'instability, change and turbulence' which was evident in these factories. Such instability and turbulence, they argued, promotes challenges to normal management policies and practices, thus forcing capital to look for new strategies. The objective of such new strategies is to find a 'working consensus' and gain legitimacy for their authority because when management ceases to manage through consensus and legitimate authority the instability becomes a crisis.[18]

While the conditions and some of the crises faced by Nampak and PG Bison management may differ from the 'models of crises' identified by Cressey et al in their study of British industry, South African industry has been experiencing instability, change and turbulence for a number of years now.[19] Thus it is possible to arrive at a similar conclusion that Nampak Polyfoil, PG Bison and indeed, all South African companies that have embraced worker participation and similar schemes, have as their primary motive the 'gaining of a working consensus' on the shop floor.

Seven possible reasons why management introduced worker participation were included in the questionnaire and in each case workers were given the option to 'agree', 'disagree' or indicate if they were 'not sure'. Table 1 below looks at responses to five of these and the results clearly indicate that most workers remain suspicious of management's intentions and believe that management is simply trying to win their co-operation in an effort to improve productivity without really giving workers anything meaningful in return. The results also point to a very strong fear that management is trying to weaken or undermine the union.[20]

The findings are particularly pertinent here as they illustrate not only the factors which led to the disillusionment of the workers, but they also highlight important issues related to the concerns and aspirations of workers on the shopfloor. The tables that follow in this and other

sections report on responses to a set of questions which required workers to evaluate the process and to indicate whether it had brought any benefits around the areas specified. The areas/issues specified in the questions were carefully chosen from the list of issues that the two change processes promised to improve as a matter of priority.

In the survey workers were also asked to give reasons why management had started the process in their factory and company. In responding to the specified set of questions, they were obviously drawing from their experience with the process.

TABLE 1: WHY DID MANAGEMENT INTRODUCE WORKER PARTICIPATION?

Table 1(a)

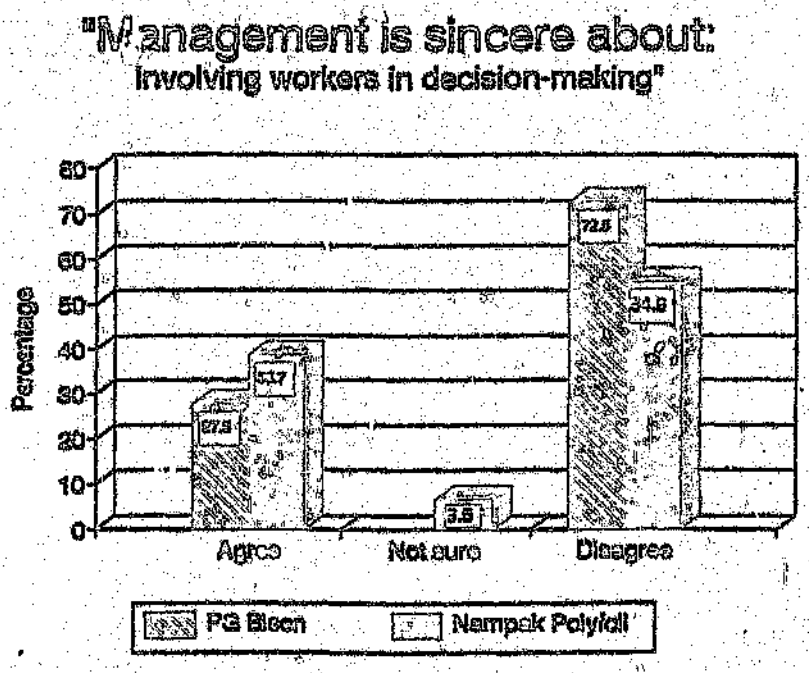


Table 1 (b)

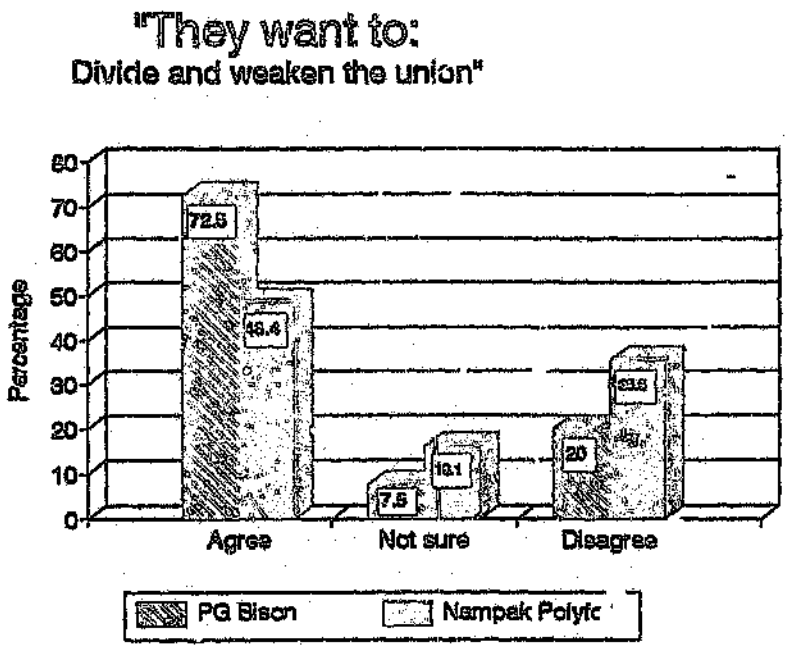


Table 1(c)

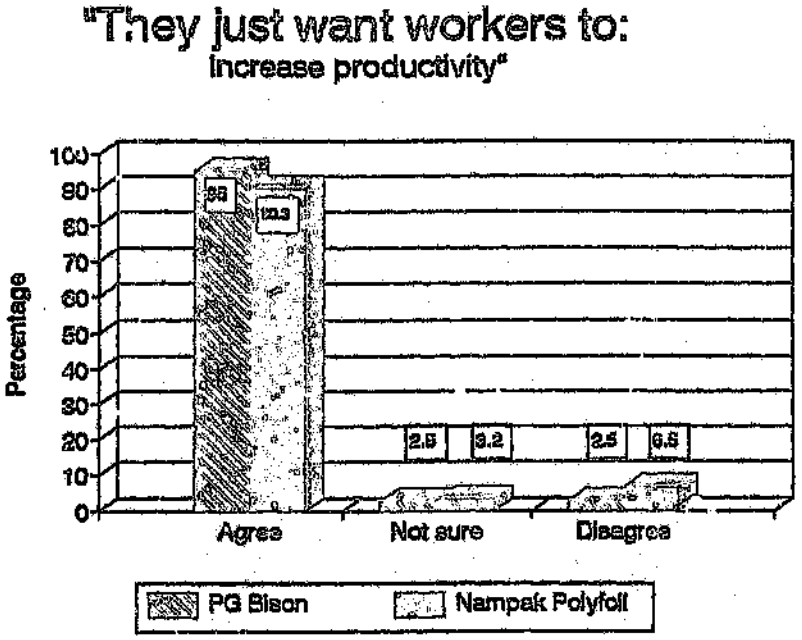


Table 1(d)

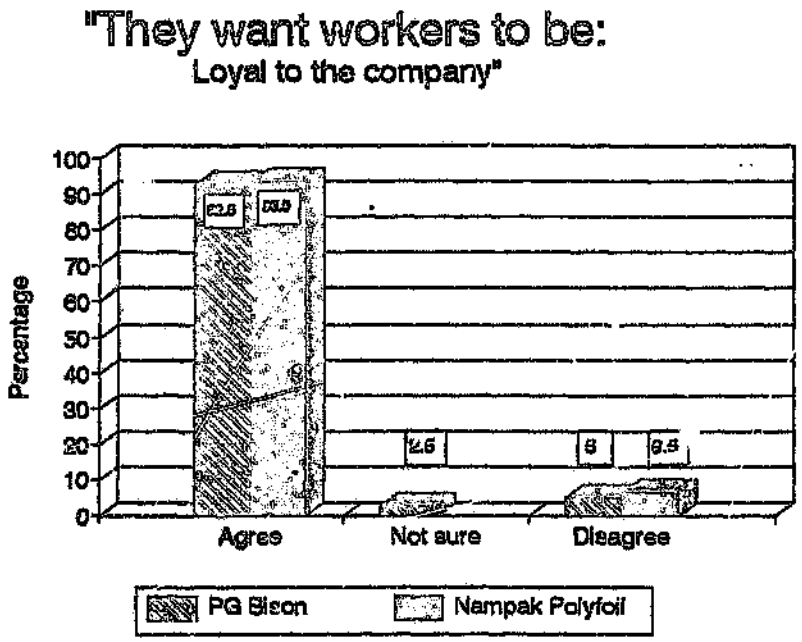
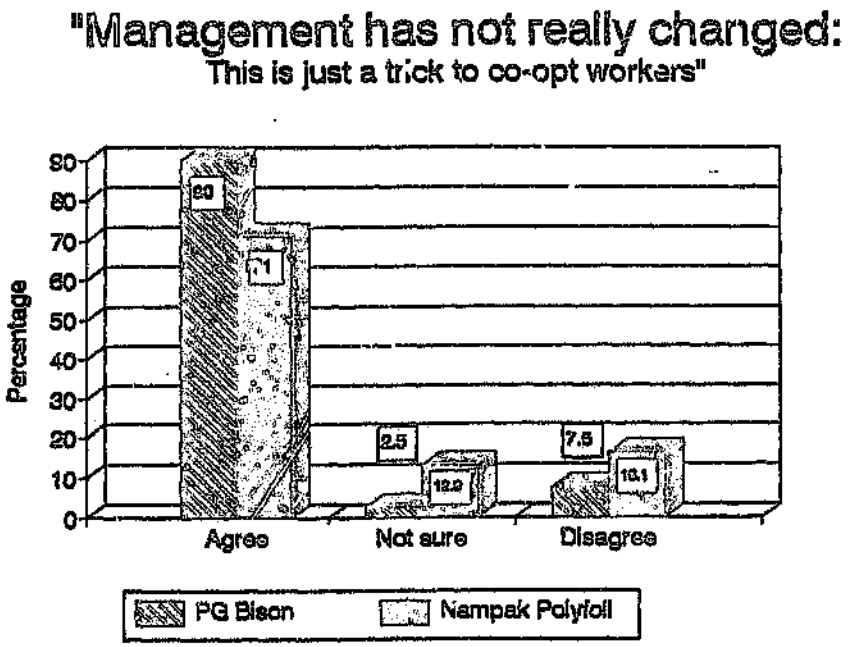


Table 1 (e)



It will be noted from this table that the responses of the workers are, with a few exceptions at Nampak Polyfoil, generally negative. They also suggest that workers were suspicious of management's intentions. This suspicions appear to arise from the from their experience of what they regard as management's lack of good faith and unwillingness to relinquish their control on the shopfloor. As one Nampak Polyfoil shop steward put it,

> (T)here is fear from management that we as workers want to take control of the running of the factory. Also, on our side, we were suspicious that whatever white people may say, they are still white people and they are oppressors and there will be a motive behind what they are saying to us. At that time we took decisions on issues that needed to be done practically. But what we saw was that in most cases management was making fools of us. They would say, 'yes, we will do this', but at the end of the day when they were supposed to take practical action we would find that they were not abiding by decisions.[21]

Yet Nampak Polyfoil worker believed that, through power, they could make some gains by engaging in the process irrespective of managements' agenda. This probably comes from the workers' experience of the independent union movement's tradition of engaging management, when the balance of power is favourable, in order to win incremental gains, and blocking management programmes when the balance of power is not favorable. This would seem to suggest that workers on the shopfloor make conscious choices on whether to engage or to embark on militant abstentionism. In other words, militant abstentionism was never conceived of as an approach appropriate for all situations, nor was engagement regarded as a universally undesirable strategy. A more plausible explanation is that the tradition of shopfloor unionism, of which PPWAWU members are part, has taught workers to embark on either of these strategies after carefully considering the costs and benefits of each strategy as well as the balance of power in the relationship between capital and labour. The difference between the two factories seems to indicate that where workers have power and believe that the balance of power is in their favour, they tend to favour a strategy of engagement. This becomes clear in the case of Nampak Polyfoil where, according to Masuku, management approached the workers again in 1993 suggesting that the change process be revived. The workers agreed to become involved in the process once again in order to test it. Masuku says the workers said,

> '(W)e will see what management's aims concerning this thing, whether they want to use us as slaves to jack up their production. Then if that is the case they will be surprised to see what will happen because everything can just come to a standstill'. And they have also said, 'it is never too late to take a step back'.[22]

On the other hand, where workers do not have power and do not believe that the balance of power is in their favour, the preference for militant abstentionism tends to be greater than for engagement. PG Bison's situation after the suspension of TPQ is a typical example of this scenario.

4. About The Survey Sample

The choice of the sample was stratified into a number of variables - age, race, grade/wages, education, department, location of factory (rural/urban) and gender. What is significant about the results is that those variables played almost no role in determining the responses of the workers in the sample. A cross-tabulation of these variables with other responses showed no correlation between particular variables and particular responses. For example, Table 2(1) below shows that 52% of the workers at Nampak Polyfoil agreed that management's attitude towards workers had improved while 48% said it had not changed. When these responses were cross-tabulated with variables like age, gender, race, education, job title and department, no correlation was found between any of the two responses and these variables. The same was done with other responses and similar results came out.

Thus the above variables are important not so much for the way they affect or influence workers' attitudes towards participatory management, but for their usefulness in assessing union power on the shopfloor. All the workers in the sample were members of PPWAWU and most were unskilled and semi-skilled workers whose earnings are calculated hourly and paid weekly (weekly paid employees). It was found that the union enjoyed tremendous support and exercised influence among workers in this category regardless of race, age, education, grade, gender, grade and location of the factory. Over and above the exploitation which all workers experience as a class, in the past management practices in these factories discriminated without exception against all those unskilled and semi-skilled workers who were not white. From its inception the union earned this support and influence because it

projected itself as the champion of the cause of all workers in the unskilled/semi-skilled/black categories. PPWAWU could easily point to many victories it had achieved in promoting the interests of these workers. Thus the stratification of the union members' sample according to the above variables became useful to show that the union enjoyed widespread support on the shopfloor.

5. A Workers' Critique of Management-Initiated Forms of Worker Participation:

Workers' and shop stewards' notion of what worker participation or industrial democracy is, or should be, had as its starting point a critique of what management was trying to do. In both cases management's initial offer to allow worker participation raised excitement and expectations among many workers because management's rhetoric when introducing the process promised to bring about many changes on the shop floor and in the way the companies were run. According to Sipho Kubheka, these were long-standing demands by the workers. He argues that because the unions had failed to prepare a clear programme of action on worker participation and control, management then took these demands and turned them into "weapons of management, to further deepen their controlling process".[23] At PG Bison TPQ promised to end racial discrimination, to guarantee life-long employment, participation in decision-making structures right up to the board of directors, incentive bonus schemes, and greater say for workers around their specific jobs. But when the process failed to produce results workers became critical and in both factories this led them to withdraw their support. At PG Bison the workers waited for three years to see results but none of the promises materialised. Instead new practices, like 'multi-skilling', which were not acceptable to workers were introduced, and shop stewards became alienated from the workers. As one PG Bison worker commented later,

> When TPQ came it sounded very good. We thought that it would bring us many good things. But now it is clear that we cannot get any good from TPQ.[24]

A similar situation occurred at Nampak Polyfoil when the change process failed to translate into real benefits for the workers. Workers began to feel that the change process was a

strategy by management to adapt to changing circumstances, nationally and internationally, rather than a sincere attempt to concede some of their prerogatives to the workers:

> The change process was introduced because management saw apartheid is dying and competition will grow. They realised that if they are not up to standard they will lose the market. It is not because they care about the workers.[25]

Tables 2 and 3 below look at responses to questions about the impact of the change processes on conditions and practices on the shopfloor. It should be noted that these questions were asked after the processes had collapsed and when the workers had withdrawn their support. Had the survey been conducted at the time when workers were still enthusiastic about PG Bison's TPQ and Nampak Polyfoil's 'change process', it is possible that different results would have emerged. The significance of these results, however, is that they serve as an explanation of why the workers withdrew their support by boycotting the processes. If the survey had been conducted while the workers still supported the processes and the results were more positive than what is presented here, then those results would have been an explanation of why workers were supporting the processes. Thus the results in these tables give an indication of the yardsticks by which the workers measured the the benefits, or lack thereof, of the change processes.

TABLE 2: WORKER ATTITUDES TO MANAGEMENT-INITIATED PARTICIPATION:

Table 2 (a)

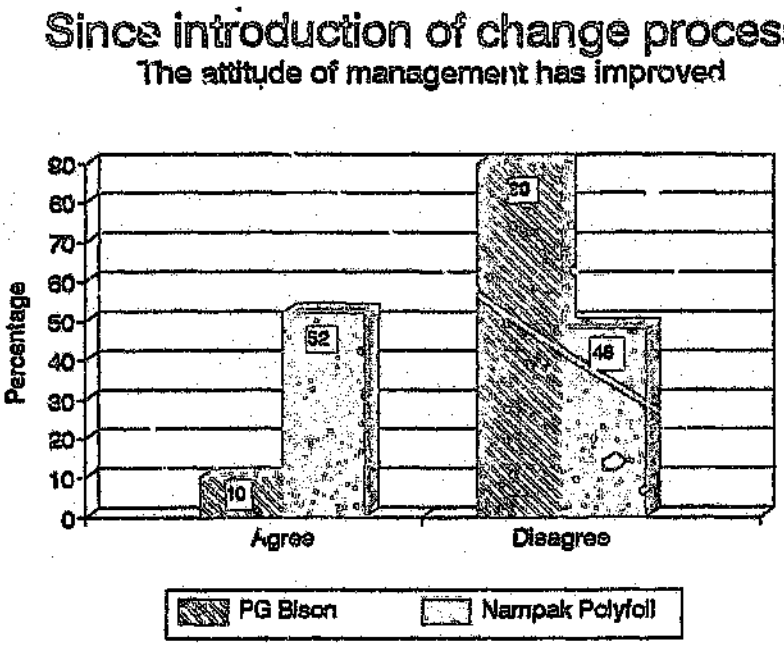


Table 2 (b)

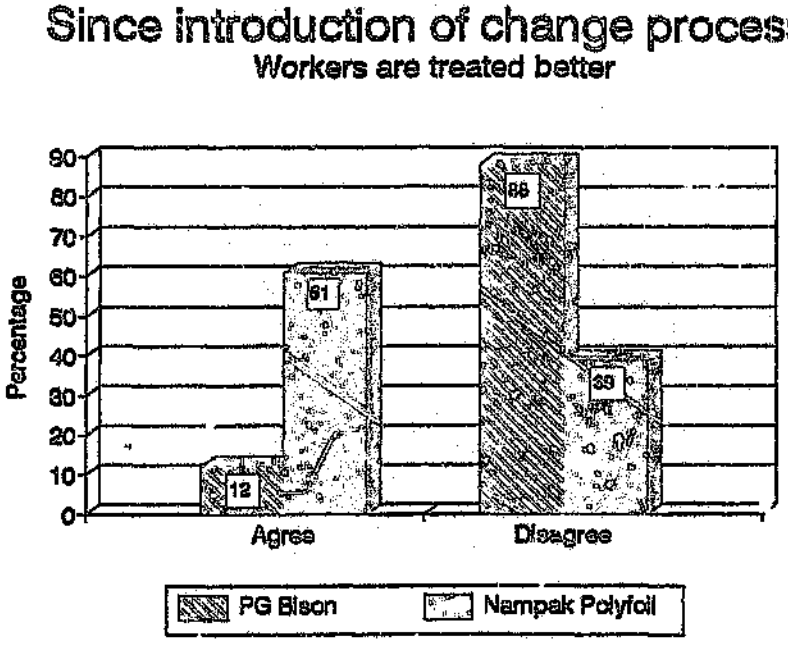


Table 2 (c)

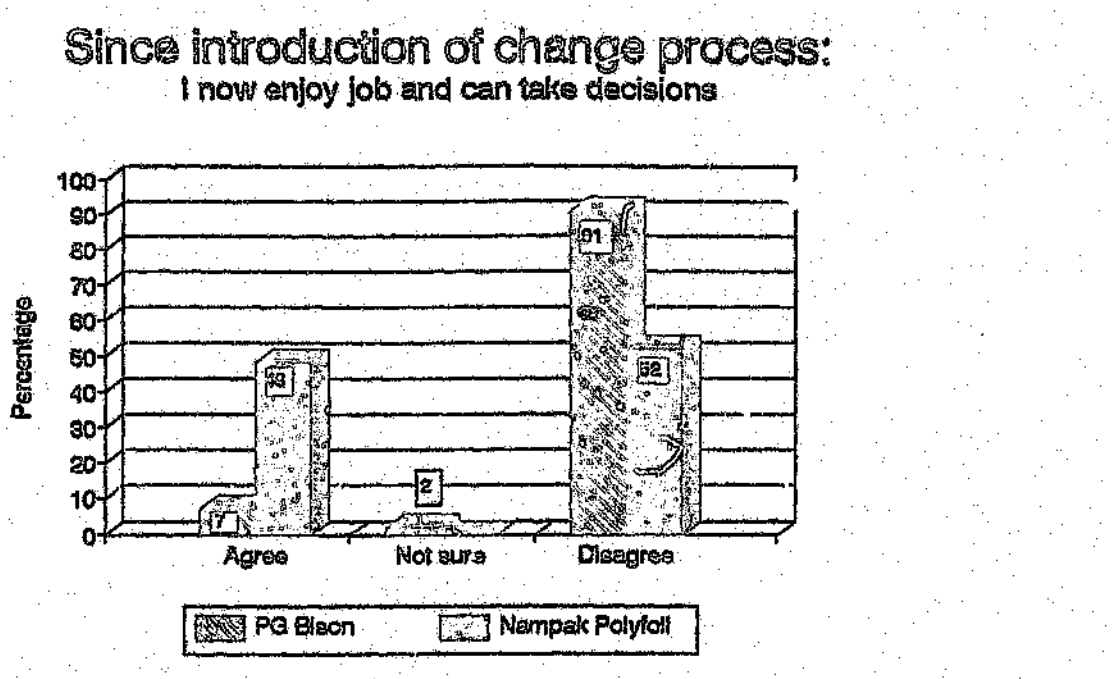


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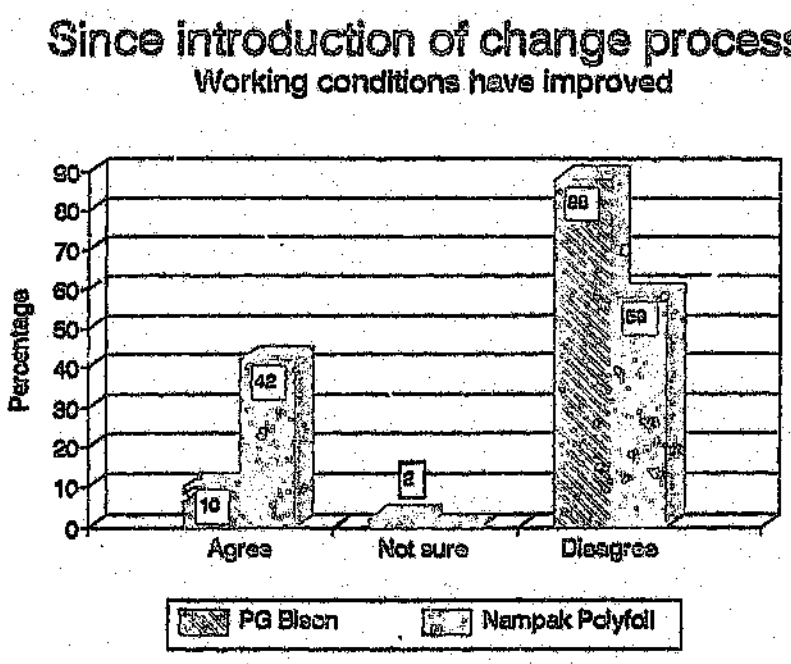


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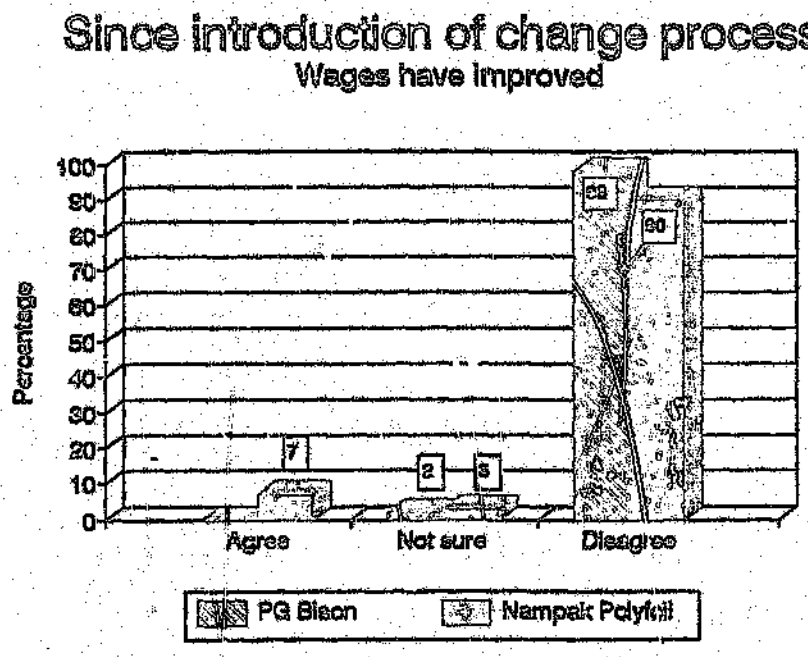


Table 2 (f)

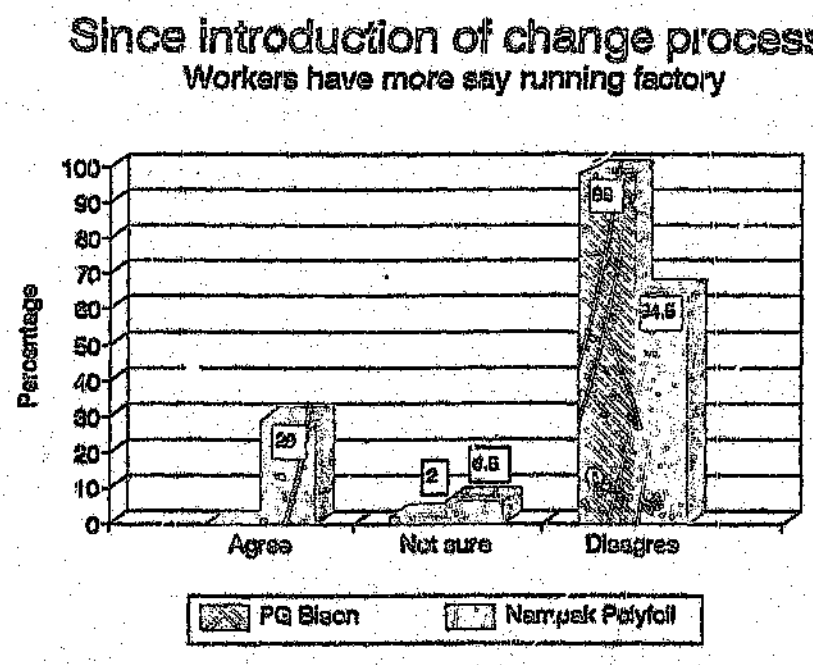


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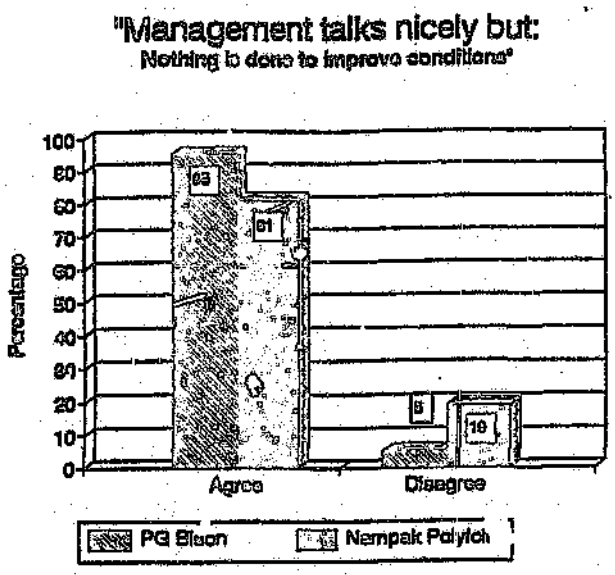
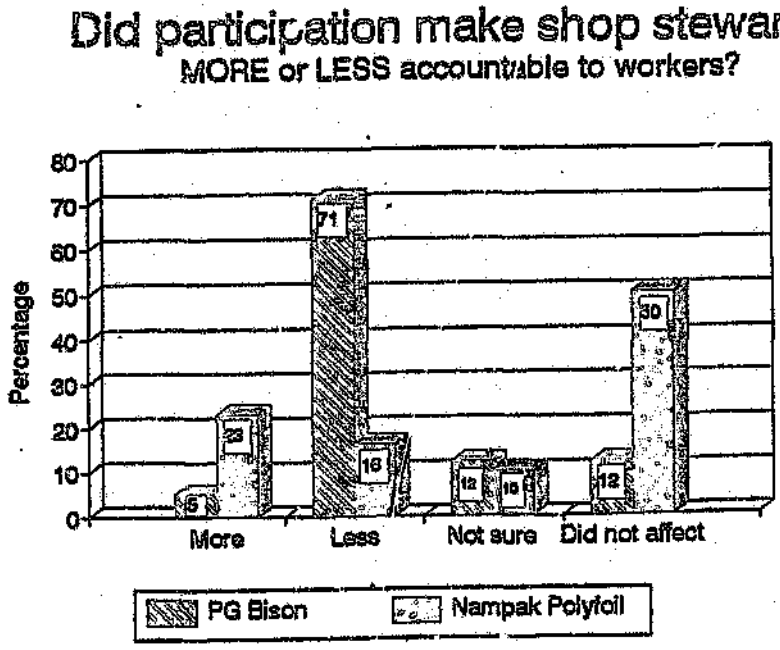


Table 3 looks at shop stewards and the role that they played. It is significant to note the difference in responses between the two factories in this table. This seems to indicate the degree to which the shop stewards had become alienated from their membership. In other words, the results show a greater degree or of a democratic rupture, weakness and disorganisation at PG Bison compared to Nampak Polyfoil.

TABLE 3: **DID MANAGEMENT INITIATED-PARTICIPATION AFFECT YOUR SHOP STEWARDS:**



It will be noted from both Table 2 and Table 3 that the degree of disenchantment at PG Bison was much higher than at Nampak Polyfoil. This is probably explained by the fact that at PG Bison the process had had a longer life span and the workers had given it a longer chance to prove itself, whereas at Polyfoil the process was boycotted even before some aspects of it could be implemented and be subjected to scrutiny. What seems to have influenced the decision of the Nampak Polyfoil workers was failure of management to make an unequivocal commitment to worker participation, and the intervention by influential shop stewards who argued that the process would never deliver results because management was not committed to change. These shop stewards also pointed out to workers that the change process was weakening the union and that shop stewards were no longer performing their duties effectively. However, the results also show that even though the debate was won by the majority faction led by these shop stewards, there were still some workers who either believed that through power they could wring out some concessions from management or who saw opportunities for themselves in the change process.[26]

The suspension of the processes came after workers had made an assessment of the costs and benefits to themselves as individuals and as a collective. But it seems that in each case only one meeting of the entire union membership was held to assess the process and these were the meetings where the decision to suspend the processes were taken. At Nampak Polyfoil the decision to call a meeting was forced by the resignation of two key shop stewards. The remaining shop stewards then called the two to a meeting to discuss the matter The committee then decided to call a general meeting to discuss the resignations but this general meeting ended up being the platform to assess the change process.

At PG Bison a general meeting was called to discuss whether two shop stewards delegates to the National Forum should attend a meeting in Johannesburg or not. It is not clear who called the general meeting, but it also ended up evaluating TPQ and at the end of the discussion the workers voted to suspend their involvement in TPQ.

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While most workers and shop stewards complained that most of the issues agreed in discussions with management were not implemented, they felt that even those aspects that were implemented by management were introduced in a way that brought little, if any, benefit

to the workers. At PG Bison the only aspects of TPQ which were implemented were the incentive bonus, the in-a-groups (teams) and adult literacy classes. In February 1994 the adult literacy classes were the only aspect of TPQ which remained. Qoqozulu Mngomezulu, a shop steward at PG Bison, believes that the in-a-groups failed because management used the wrong approach in implementing them:

> (T)hey introduced the in-a-groups, but mainly at the top level, at management level. But they failed to introduce the groups among the workers. Instead they introduced multi-skilling.[27]

The groups were supposed to be semi-autonomous work groups which allowed workers greater freedom and power to discuss and take decisions about their own jobs so that they could do them better. Instead, they were seen by many workers to be another management structure whose job was to convey further instructions to the shop floor. So they were rejected by the workers. Thus any hopes by workers that TPQ would allow them more say in decision-making were dashed and the ubiquitous foremen and supervisors continued to rule supreme on the shop floor. When the process was introduced supervisors and foremen felt threatened by the prospect of workers assuming greater responsibility for their own jobs. According to shop stewards supervisors and foremen kept reminding workers that "TPQ is at the training centre (where the value-sharing sessions were held), and not in the plant".[28] At Nampak Polyfoil first line managers also became apprehensive, fearing for their jobs in the event of more decision-making powers being delegated to workers in their work stations. Managing director, Loutjie de Jongh referred to these fears during an interview:

> I would not be surprised if there is a manager or two, or a supervisor who wants to sabotage the process. They would also like to sabotage it because they are seeing it as a threat.[29]

For supervisors and foremen at PG Bison, one way of sabotaging TPQ was to cling to their powers to decide and direct the activities of the workers on the shopfloor. As one shop steward explained,

> Here you are not able to take decisions regarding your own work and you have no role

> in higher decisions....They have blocked all opportunities for workers to become involved in decision-making. The supervisors are keeping some of those job-related powers for themselves.[30]

The 'multi-skilling' that management introduced was, in fact, multi-tasking, a practice which became very unpopular among workers and which was to lead to the demise of TPQ at the factory. A shop steward explained how 'multi-skilling' worked,

> Some of the things that were happening were unacceptable to the workers. Management introduced new rules without consultation. Like they introduced multi-skilling and many other things. Multi-skilling caused many problems for workers. For example, they would take a job that was done by four people and give it to two people. Then they would take the other two to another department. So you would find that two workers were doing the job of four workers. When management introduced this multi-skilling the manager told us that the remaining two workers would share the wages of the two other workers. But as time went on it became clear that nothing was going to happen. So it created serious problems for the workers and that is when the workers started complaining about TPQ.[31]

As far as the incentive bonus is concerned many workers said they had never received it. Those who had received it at some stage said management had stopped it because they claimed production was low.

Since the suspension of Nampak Polyfoil's change process management has tried to revive it by introducing a production bonus and 'natural working teams'. It is difficult to assess these because at the time of the study both had just been introduced. But many workers and shop stewards expressed the view that they would support team-working provided the positions of supervisors and team leaders [32] were phased out and their powers delegated to the teams. The teams would then elect team leaders or co-ordinators from within their ranks who would have a fixed term of office. With regard to the incentive bonus many workers did not even know about it. Those who did felt that the conditions set for getting the bonus were too strict and that this would make it impossible for most workers to get it. Others felt the workers did not have the power or access to information for them to be able to verify whether or not they were meeting the production targets which entitle them to receive the bonus.

However, the general problem at Polyfoil was that workers and shop stewards felt management was not acting in good faith. The first phase of the change process was the discussion of values which would serve as guidelines for acceptable conduct and practice by all in the company. These discussions deadlocked, particularly on the question of participation by workers, and so the values could not be finalised. Workers then withdrew their support for the process. But management later tried to introduced 'natural working teams' without consulting the workers.

> Instead of addressing those values, management came up with a new system of natural working teams which they had discussed and finalised. So what they expected from us was to just accept the new system and implement it. So at the moment we are still waiting for them to implement this system because it is their system.[33]

The workers' criticisms of the change processes point to a major weakness of the processes at PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil, namely, that, at best, the changes which management introduced were cosmetic. It would appear that management was not prepared to concede any more control of the labour process than that which the workers had wrestled from them through struggle. This is illustrated by management practices and statements on three issues - work teams, participation and the flattening of hierarchies of control. While PG Bison workers believed that the in-a-groups (work teams) should provide an opportunity for workers to "have a say in planning their tasks"[34], engineering department manager, D. Ferreira argued for a different role of the in-a-groups.

> In-a-groups should be the channel to communicate to workers, to transmit information. For example, a manager using them to tell people to wear earmuffs. We must do like the Japanese do. But you can't get things working immediately. We couldn't immediately delegate authority because workers do not have the information and decision-making background. Management has got the information.[35]

This statement was simultaneously an argument in favour of maintaining the existing

hierarchies of control and other Taylorist practices. In short, it was an argument in favour of the separation between conception and execution, which flies in the face of the group's commitment to a participatory style of management. Furthermore, it would seem that Ferreira was echoing the sentiments of many, if not all, his colleagues in management. Where these groups were established they were used for precisely the same purpose that he had in mind. A shop steward gave an account of his experience of an in-a-group:

> They [in-a-groups] were not in all departments, but they were there in a number of departments. It happened by the MD, Andries Vorster, calling you, "so and so, come to my office quickly". When you get there he would dictate and dictate and tell you, "this and that I don't like". That would be an in-a-group. For example, he would call Zeph, myself (at the time not being a shop steward), Nqaba and Mathebula. They would call us 'seniors' among the black workers. He would then tell us, "this and that I do not want to see".[36]

Nampak Polyfoil's managing director, Loutjie de Jongh, also argued for a clear separation between conception and execution, pointing out that "management has got a job to do and the workers have got a job to do". He went to argue that,

> I haven't been to university for eight years for nothing. I have gone there to be equipped to have the ability to make certain decisions....I don't believe that it is worth the energy to discuss things with people that do not understand the implications and that do not have a direct contribution to make towards getting to a positive outcome or a specific outcome....To ask other people where to spend the money in terms of greater output other than extruder or something like that, I don't think that they have the ability to make that decision. And *I don't know what the good is of asking the people anyway.*[37] [Italics added for emphasis.]

At both factories these were the problems and contradictory statements which convinced workers that management was not ready to embark on meaningful change. It was in the process of criticising management-initiated participatory processes that workers began to come out with their own notions of workplace democratisation. What follows below is a discussion of these notions of democratisation and their potential to become the foundation of a new union vision for workplace participation.

6. 'We Need a Democratic Management Team'

One of the interesting findings of the research is that workers hold moderate views on industrial democracy which are similar to those held by what Clegg calls the 'reformist industrial democrats' who maintain that industrial democracy can be achieved by worker participation in management without changing the ownership of the means of production.[38] In the questionnaire workers were given three statements (see table below) and were asked to indicate if they 'agree', were 'not sure' or 'disagree' with each statement.

The survey results also indicate that the majority of workers in both factories favour participation by the workforce in decision-making. Table 4 below shows a strong preference for joint decision-making (workers and management) in the workplace. By contrast very few or no workers preferred unilateral decision-making by management or full workers' control where ownership and control of the factory was vested in the workers themselves.

TABLE 4: WHO SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS IN THE WORKPLACE?:

Table 4 (a)

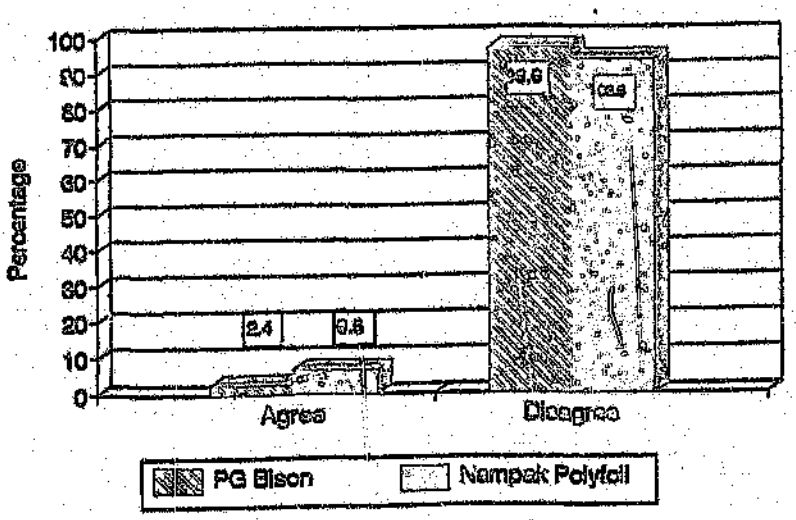


Table 4 (b)

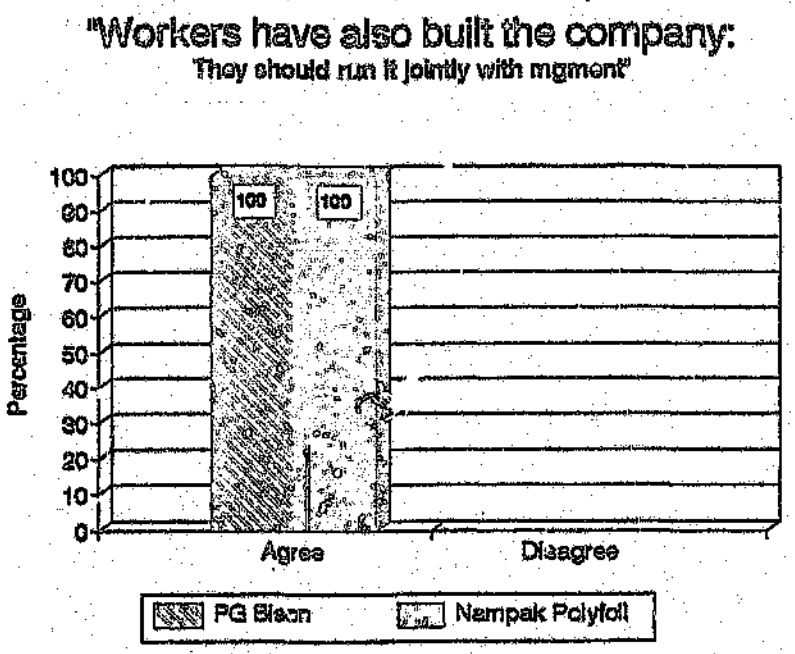
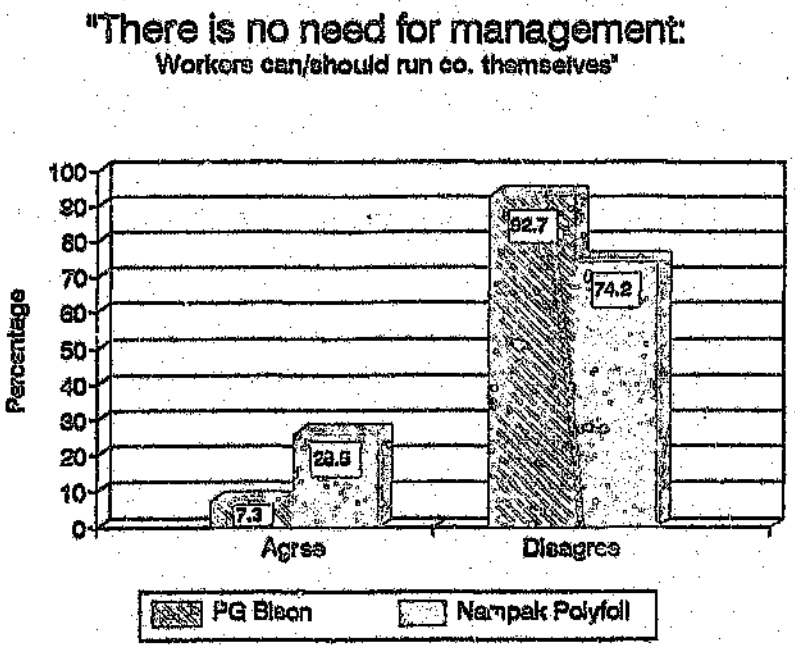


Table 4 (c)



The responses show that most workers reject the notion that 'management knows all and should therefore take all decisions'. [39] But what is more significant is that most workers in both factories rejected the notion of workers running the factory on their own and, instead showed a strong preference for joint control and management. As one PG Bison worker put it,

> We need management. Workers cannot run the factory alone. The only problem is that the present management is unjust. There must be someone in charge. We need a democratic management team.[40]

These results also seem to stand in stark contrast to present COSATU policy and the rhetoric of some unionists, particularly during the 1980s, which called for worker control of production in a socialist system. It is not clear whether these results indicate a shift by workers away from socialism or whether this has always been the view of rank and file union members. But what can be said at this stage is that the results are consistent with workers' past experience and union practice of making winnable demands which achieve incremental gains, thus enabling workers to push back the frontier of control. If it is indeed the case that workers view the struggle for industrial democracy, and trade union struggles in general, as being the art of the possible, then these results do not necessarily negate COSATU's goal of destroying capitalism and ushering in a socialist system.

Discussions with shop stewards throw some light on how the workers would like to be involved in decision-making. They believe that the workers have a lot to contribute towards the success of the company. PG Bison shop steward Simon Dlamini feels that management are not making use of workers' ideas,

> Management should not just assume that because workers are on the factory floor they have nothing to contribute. I think that is very important for the success of a process like this. Workers should be given powers to do certain things or to implement certain decisions themselves, or they should be allowed to have a say in decision-making.[41]

This desire to participate is expressed in relation to two levels of the factory, namely, on the shop floor around the jobs that workers do, and at the level of the factory as an economic entity. The demand for participation on the shop floor is often made because workers believe they know their jobs well enough to take the right decisions and to ensure that the production process runs smoothly. Workers in both factories were very unhappy with the irrationalities of the present system of decision-making on the shop floor and resented the powers that supervisors and team leaders wielded. There was a view that team-working (whether in natural working teams or in-a-groups) would allow workers to be more creative, responsible and efficient. Workers and shop stewards argued that this autonomy in the labour process would create ideal conditions for them to apply their tacit skills, knowledge and experience accumulated informally through continuous involvement in the labour process, to improve efficiency and productivity. A shop steward put it cogently in her observation that,

> If we work in teams you know where you work, what you must do in your team. You don't have to go around and ask the supervisor, 'now it is like this, what must I do?'. You talk to your team, you discuss your problem, you discuss about the work. That is the way I understand it.[42]

Workers at PG Bison had a similar view. This sentiment was expressed in a group discussion with shop stewards about the role of the in-a-groups.

> Workers thought the in-a-groups would plan their work. But the groups were used to instruct workers, not to allow them a say in planning their tasks.[43]

In both cases management desparately wanted to access the tacit skills of workers and this was the motivation for setting up the work teams. But they did not want to create what workers believed to be the necessary conditions for accessing those skills, namely, the dismantling of the primary structures of managerial control, in the form of team leaders, supervisors and foremen, and the delegation of powers previously vested in these structures to the workers themselves. As one Nampak Polyfoil shop steward put it,

> The people should control themselves so that they can be efficient, because now these supervisors and the team leaders are oppressing the people and they are doing nothing at the end of the day. When they knock off here they are having more money than

> what I got, and I'm doing the whole job. In terms of quality and proper bags that should be packed, the operator is responsible for that job. If that job can be rejected by the customer the operator suffers at the end of the day. And now where does the quality start? It starts from extrusion, goes to the quality controllers for check up and is then sent to bagging. Now all that chain is not being considered. Also, within that chain there is a quality manager. But now the poor operator must come and suffer at the end of the day, sit here with a final written warning, a written warning, at the end of the day loses the job.[44]

As the above statement makes clear, the demand for more participation by workers around their jobs, whether through teams or as individuals, is linked to another, namely, that management hierarchies be flattened. At PG Bison workers believed that a start could be made by doing away with supervisors and foremen while at Polyfoil workers wanted to do away with team leaders and supervisors. In both cases team leaders, supervisors and foremen were said to be the ones most vehemently opposed to change on the shop floor.

While getting rid of team leaders, supervisors and foremen was seen as a solution by some workers, there were those who argued that it does not solve the problem at all:

> Let me tell you something that is so easy. You can say, 'yes, let's get rid of these two people, the supervisor and the team leader'. There will be one person who is going to be involved because if they still impose instructions to the people, that is not going to stop when they take the supervisor and the team leader. It will remain the same. Someone else will take over that job. So now the right thing that we think is going to solve the problem is to have representatives in those structures [management structures].[45]

Thus for some workers the demand to participate on the shopfloor was linked to one for participation at higher levels of decision-making. In both cases the processes which management introduced did not provide for participation in company-wide decision-making. This is not to suggest that TPQ and the change process had a clear strategy of participation on the shopfloor either. However, both processes did provide for some form of pseudo participation on the shopfloor because, as argued above, management needed to win the consent and co-operation of the workforce in the labour process. A Nampak Polyfoil shop steward summarized the rationale for workers wanting to participate in factory/company level

decision-making:

> We wanted to be represented in the decision-making structures of the company, from the general manager's structure down to the team leaders' structure on the shop floor. Our view was that whenever Mr de Jongh [general manager] is going to do anything in the company there must be a committee of worker representatives that he consults with....We did not want things to come down to us as matters that have already been decided upon, coming to us via certain people, namely from the general manager to the operations manager who will then take it to the middle mangers, then the middle managers taking it to the supervisors, then supervisors taking it down to us as instructions saying, 'we are doing this'....We wanted somebody who would be there and, if there was a need to table a proposal from the workers, that person would be able to table those proposals as part of the decision-making process. The purpose of such representation would be to ensure that the views of the workers are taken account of when decisions are being made.[46]

This desire to participate derives from worker's experience of democracy in a trade union, a form of representative democracy where rank and file workers have representation in all decision-making structures and where those at the top do not impose decisions from the top down. This particular demand indicates that management has a credibility crisis, where workers believe they cannot trust management to take the right and just decisions to accommodate all interests within the company. As Table 4 above suggests, workers are not demanding participation because they are waging an ideological battle to bring down the system of capitalism in order to replace it with some kind of utopian system of workers' control of the means of production. In the questionnaire workers were asked to list three things that would have to be done to make their factory democratic. In both factories joint decision-making came top of the list followed by such other demands as full disclosure of all information, promotion opportunities for blacks, education and training opportunities, an end to racial discrimination and favouritism, better wages, housing subsidies, equal pay for equal work and team working to replace team leaders and supervisors.[47]

An interesting observation made in both factories is that the national union played no role in assisting the workers and the shop stewards to develop a response to the new strategies of management. The only union intervention some shop stewards could recall was a discussion paper written by PPWAWU unionists, Welcome Ntshangase and Apolis Solomons, which identified three options for the union: stand back and let it happen, obstruct the process or

become centrally involved. For most shop stewards the paper was useful only insofar as it identified and discussed the options. Beyond that they felt the union was not giving any guidance in defining the content of a response to the initiatives of management. A Nampak Polyfoil shop steward complained that most of their full-time union officials did not have enough skills to help workers respond to the change process.

> (S)ometimes it brings us to the same level. You find that we are on the same level of understanding, and no one is in a position to give any advice. You find management doing whatever they want.[48]

Notwithstanding this and other weaknesses facing the union, workers on the shop floor are in the process of developing a framework which will become the foundation of their notion of industrial democracy. The results of the workers' survey as well as interviews with shop stewards would seem to suggest that from the perspective of union members and shopfloor leadership, shopfloor democratisation cannot be divorced from the struggles they have been fighting over the years. From this point of view democratisation is about making gains on bread and butter issues and conditions of employment, removing discriminatory practices and winning more autonomy and control in the labour process and at higher levels company decision-making. Thus the key elements of this emerging framework are:

a) Workers' involvement in decision-making at all levels (in some instances this may involve flattening management hierarchies, particularly on the shop floor. Involving workers in decision-making also involves developing, jointly with the workers, better systems of consultation and communication).
b) Full disclosure of all information.
c) Better opportunities for all workers. This includes education, training, promotions.
d) Fair rewards and incentive schemes (this includes wages, bonuses).
e) Fair and equal treatment for all (no racial discrimination, an effort to improve living standards of workers as well as their physical working conditions, fair grading systems, no favouritism, no victimisation).

Central to the workers' organic notion of industrial democracy is joint decision-making (no decisions imposed), justice and fairness and transparency. This is the test that any

management strategy of worker participation would have to pass before management can be able to re-establish a 'working consensus' at the two factories. Despite the differences in strength of shopfloor union organisation between the two factories referred to in Chapter 3, there is a great degree of convergence of views among workers of both factories on the elements of this framework of shopfloor democratisation. This is probably a result of the workers' common experience of the capitalist l... ...r process and apartheid oppression which manifested itself inside and outside the workplace.

One of the key strengths of the workers' notion of industrial democracy, therefore, is the fact that its point of departure is the realities of the shop floor, including the grievances, aspirations and demands of the workers. This makes it an organic notion of workplace democratisation from below rather than a policy from branch and national structures of the union. The debate among the workers is far from over. For some inside and outside of the labour movement it is always tempting to take either what Cressey and MacInnes call the 'incorporationist' approach or the 'advance of labour approach'.[49] But to understand the real challenge of worker participation means we have to understand what Cressey and MacInnes term the 'material space for struggle at the point of production' which 'cuts both ways'[50]:

> If we escape from the notion of a working class which prior to the historical break is merely an 'aspect of capital' but exists politically as a universal force opposed to it, and open up the possibility for a 'practical and prefigurative socialist politics', then it must also be remembered that such a struggle roots itself initially in the workplace rather than in the class struggle as a whole. Just as such struggles are not artificial and 'incorporated', neither are they necessarily 'spontaneously' socialist. They may take either form, and the task before us is surely thus to develop yardsticks for differentiating the two and promoting the latter.[51]

7. 'I Will Only Leave the Union When I Die'

Whether or not the union is equal to the 'task' identified by Cressey and MacInnes is a matter that is ultimately beyond the scope of this thesis. It has been shown above that the union has not intervened in any serious way on the shop floor regarding worker participation. But this did not seem to have affected the support the union commands among the workers. Union

members were asked the question, 'Do you feel there is still a need for the union after management introduced participatory management?' and had to answer 'yes' or 'no'. In both factories 100 percent of the workers answered 'yes'! Workers in both factories have seen many improvements brought by the union over the years. As one worker explained,

> We cannot do without the union. I will only leave the union when I die. Even when we have a new government we will still need a union. We will always need a union. It is our only hope. Before we were getting dismissed every day. Now the union has stopped that.[52]

There are a number of factors that explain the level of support the union enjoys among its members and workers are influenced by some or all these factors:

Firstly, the union has won real gains for the workers in terms of wages, physical working conditions, treatment by managers/foremen/supervisors, building solidarity among the workers and winning other conditions of work like shorter hours of work, shift allowances and struggle holidays. The union has also managed to reduce or stop some unfair practices like unfair dismissals, etc.

Secondly, the union is seen by the majority of workers to be operating democratically. Workers were asked a set of questions on how the union handles negotiations with management. The results are presented in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: HOW DOES THE UNION (SHOP STEWARDS ORGANISERS) HANDLE NEGOTIATIONS WITH MANAGEMENT?:

Table 5 (a)

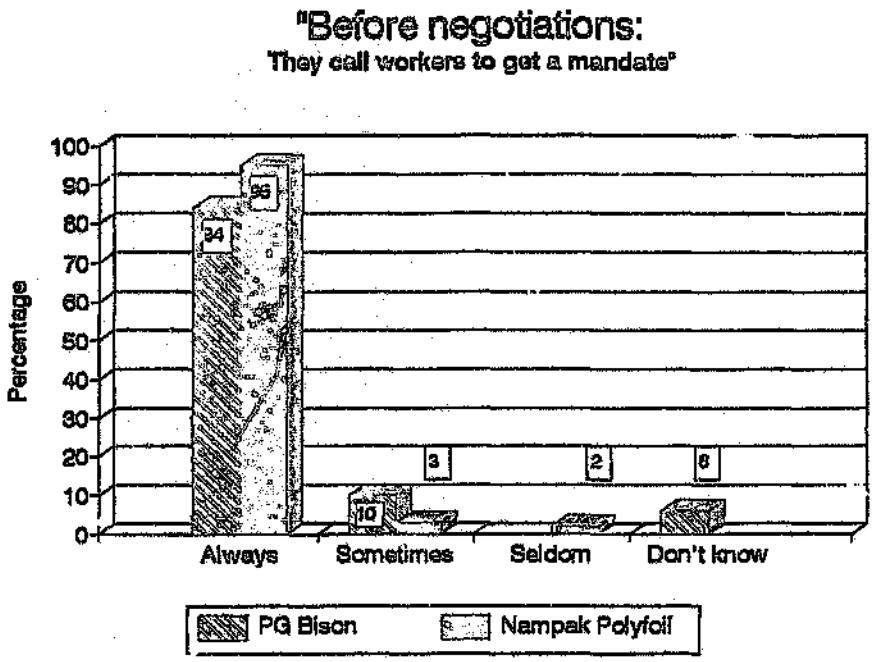


Table 5 (b)

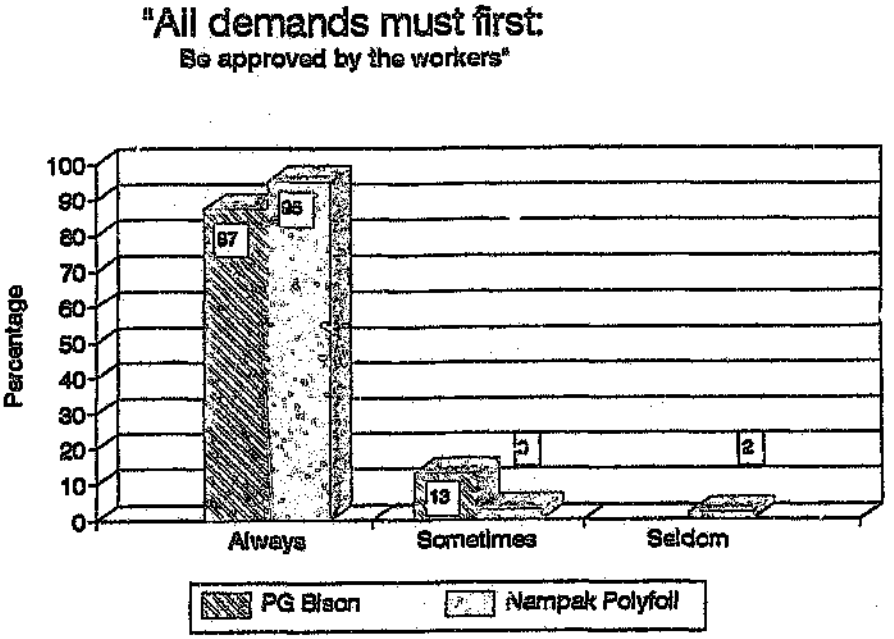


Table 5 (c)

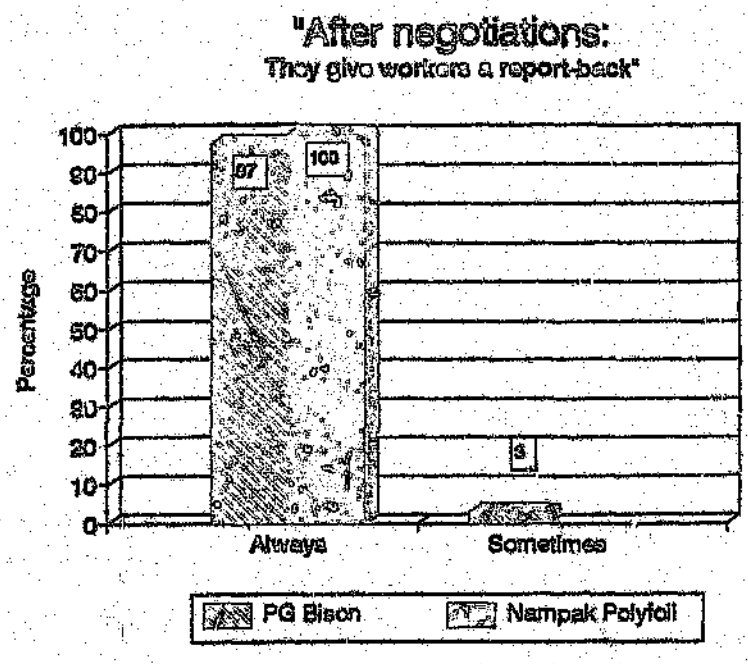
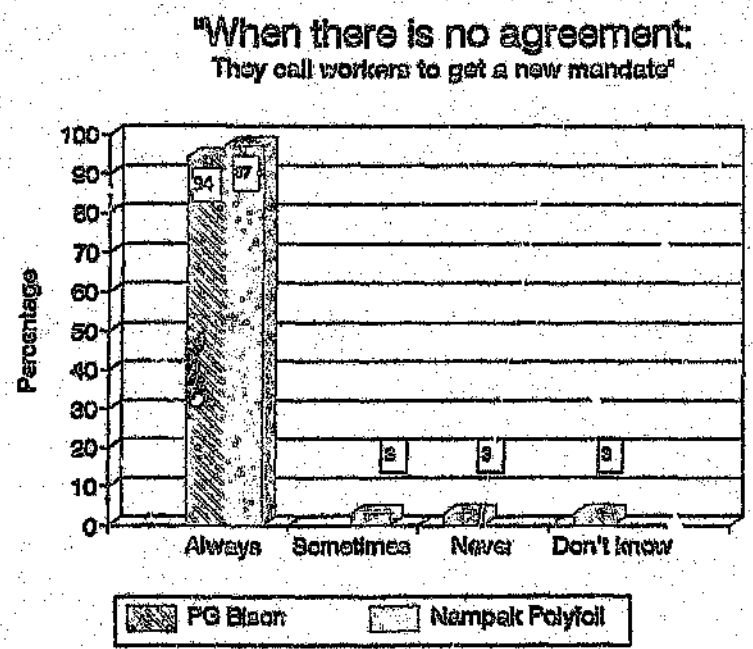


Table 5 (d)



In response to the question, "Do you feel that your shop stewards are always working according to the wishes of the workers when representing the workforce to management and the union?', workers in both factories gave the shop stewards and the union a strong vote of

confidence (100% at PG Bison and 94 percent at Polyfoil answered 'yes' to this question). Even in cases where some workers said shop stewards had acted without a mandate, they indicated that steps had been taken by workers against those shop stewards.[53]

Thirdly, all the workers had easy access to the union through their departmental shop stewards. Most workers in both factories (85 percent at PG Bison and 81 percent at Nampak Polyfoil) said they met and could consult their shop steward daily.

All the above constitute the model of democracy that unionised workers are used to, and they support it because it cares about the workers, it is accessible to all, it is fair and transparent, and the workers can exercise real control over it. One of the central arguments in this chapter therefore is that organised workers' notion of industrial democracy or worker participation is founded on their experience of democratic practice in their union. Their expectation is that industrial democracy should come close to or match that model of democracy just as they expect democracy in other spheres of society to do the same.[54]

Some may want to argue that this is a limited notion of industrial democracy, that it does not challenge the ownership of the means of production by one class, and that it is impossible to achieve democratic control in capitalist production. On the other hand, there may be those who argue that worker participation as introduced by management provides all the answers to workers' problems on the shop floor and therefore accept these schemes uncritically. Both arguments fail to understand the challenge posed by workers' struggles on the shop floor. What seems to be emerging from workers on the shop floor as they continue debating management's schemes of worker participation is a use of struggle by the workers whose emphasis is on what Goodrich ca' "the demand to take a hand in the controlling. ...the desire for a share in the job of running things".[55] The challenge to PPWAWU and indeed, the entire trade union movement, as it enters a new era of democratisation, is to begin to harness these and other experiences and workers' notions of democracy in the workplace and use them as a foundation for a new vision of workplace democratisation.

ENDNOTES:

1. A British union song reproduced from Lane, T (1974) The Union Makes Us Strong: The British Working Class, Its Trade Unionism and Politics, London: Arrow Books.

2. Webster, E. (1985) Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 127.

3. ibid., p. 128

4. ibid., p. 131.

5. ibid., p. 150.

6. Goodrich, C.L. (1920) The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics, London: G. Bell & Sons, see especially pages 54 - 56 for a discussion of workers' control.

7. COSATU Resolution on Minimum Wage, December 1985.

8. Elijah Barayi in COSATU (1987) Report from the Second National Congress of COSATU, 1987.

9. The general problem facing the unions is lack of the capacity to be pro-active on the issue. The result is, as one unionist noted, that "proposals always come from management, and the union has to respond." (Mandla Gxanyana, general secretary of Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU)) quoted in Barrret, J. (1993) "Participation at Premier: Worker Empowerment or Co-option?", SALB, 17,2.

10. Edwards, R. (1979) Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century, New York: Basic Books, p. 17.

11. Clegg, H.A. (1960) A New Approach to Industrial Democracy, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 131. See also Goodrich, C.L. (1920) The Frontier of Control, London: G. Bell and Sons, and Maller, J. (1992) Conflict and Co-operation, Johannesburg: Ravan.

12. Clegg, op. cit., pp. 131 - 132.

13. Irene Lazarus, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

14. Worker No. 26, Nampak Polyfoil.

15. Zimi Masuku, shop stewards chairperson, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1994.

16. Worker No. 25, PG Bison, Piet Retief.

17. Cressey, P., Eldridge, J. and MacInnes, J. (1985) 'Just Managing': Authority and Democracy in Industry, Milton Keynes: OUP.

18. ibid., p. 143.

19. See also von Holdt, K. (1993) "The Challenge of Participation", SALB, 17, 3, page 52.

20. The strong perception that management's initiatives were aimed to undermine or had the effect of undermining the union, particularly elected worker leadership, also came out during interviews with shop stewards in both factories. This fear has been expressed by workers and shop stewards in other factories organised by other unions. Von Holdt's (1993) research in a number of Natal factories, including Dunlop, Frame, Unilever, Alusaf and Coronation, found that "Shop stewards were suspicious or sceptical of these schemes, seeing them as dominated by management and designed to undermine the union". (von Holdt, K., 1993 op. cit., p. 49). Similarly, Barret found 'cynicism' among Premier shop stewards because of a perception that management's participation programme was 'watering down' the militancy of the shop stewards and workers. (Barret, J., 1993 op. cit., pp. 66 - 7).

21. Sydwell Qomoyi, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

22. Interview with Zimi Masuku.

23. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, former general secretary of PFWAWU, 28 November 1994.

24. Worker No. 13, PG Bison.

25. Worker No. 26, Nampak Polyfoil.

26. However, this was going to change later as the full implications of the change process became clearer to most workers. In 1994 a team of researchers from the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) and PPWAWU visited the factory to asses the impact of a group strategy called 'world class manufacturing'. Sixty workers had just been retrenched as a result of a restructuring exercise which involved rationalisation of production and the introduction of new technology. The team found a much greater degree of opposition to the change process. For details see, SWOP/PPWAWU (1994) Restructring at Nampak: A Strategy for Worker Involvement.

27. Qoqozulu Mngomezulu, shop steward, PG Bison, 9 February 1994.

28. Group interview with shop stewards, PG Bison, July 1993.

29. Interview with Loutjie de Jongh, managing director, Nampak Polyfoil, 7 October 1993.

30. Simon Dlamini, shop steward, PG Bison, 12 February 1994.

31. Simon Dlamini, shop steward, PG Bison.

32. Only Nampak Polyfoil has the position of team leader. 'Team leaders' are the lowest rung of the management hierarchy and are appointed by middle management to oversee the rest of the workforce. Despite the name, 'team leaders' precede the introduction of natural working teams by many years. They are very unpopular with most workers and the workforce now feel management is trying to impose them on the newly established teams.

33. Sydwell Qomoyi, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil.

34. Group interview with PG Bison shop stewards, Piet Retief, July 1993.

35. Interview with D. Ferreira, Engineering Departmental manager, PG Bison Piet Retief, July 1993.

36. Interview with Andries Fakude, shop steward, PG Bison, 11 February 1994.

37. Interview with Loutjie de Jongh, managing director, Nampak Polyfoil.

38. Clegg, H.A., op cit, p. 132.

39. A rather surprising exception was one worker who agreed with the first statement in the table and went on to explain, "I do not believe that a company should be run democratically. It should be run by the person or people who have put down the capital." (Worker No. 24, PG Bison, Piet Retief).

40. Worker No. 35, PG Bison.

41. Simon Dlamini, shop steward, PG Bison.

42. Irene Lazarus, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil.

43. Group discussion with shop stewards, PG Bison, July 1993.

44. Beljium Makhabane, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

45. Sydwell Qomoyi, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil.

46. Sydwell Qomoyi, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil.

47. The labour relations dispensation envisaged in the new Labour Relations Act creates opportunities which workers could exploit to make some gains on some of these issues. For example, Chapter 5 of this new law provides for forms of joint decision-making through structures called workplace forums. The forums also have powers to decide jointly with management on issues such as developing non-discrimination policies and affirmative action. Finally, the law also puts an obligation on management to disclose information to workers. See Labour Relations Act (1995).

48. Themba Tiya, shop steward, Nampak Polyfoil.

49. Cressey, P and MacInnes, J. (1980) "Voting for Ford: Industrial Democracy and the Control of Labour", Capital & Class, 11, 1980, p. 6.

50. Ibid. p. 20.

51. Ibid. p. 20.

52. Worker No. 16, Nampak Polyfoil.

53. The case of PG Bison cited in Chapter 3 is a good example of this. In one year a shop stewards' committee was perceived to be selling out to management. When their term of office expired they were not re-elected.

54. A recent study on workers expectations of parliamentary democracy done by Eddie Webster from the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) at Wits and a number of other academics also draws the conclusion that workers tend to transfer their understanding of union democracy to politics. They understand concepts like mandates and accountability in parliamentary politics in the same way that these concepts operate in union democracy (Ginsburg, D., Webster, E., et al, 1995, Taking Democracy Seriously: Worker Expectations and Parliamentary Democracy in South Africa, Durban: Indicator).

55. Goodrich, C.L., op cit, p. 37.

CHAPTER 5:

A TRADE UNION RESPONSE TO PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT: AN ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction:

This thesis began by investigating union responses to participatory management as introduced by a number of companies in South Africa. In examining this question it also sought to establish whether Max Weber's notion of bureaucracy and or Robert Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' provided a useful theoretical framework for understanding this response by trade unions. The third objective of this study was to explore the possibilities of worker participation in which workers and their union benefit without losing the ability to represent workers' collective interests.

This chapter is an attempt to provide an assessment of the ways in which PPWAWU has been responding to participatory management and to arrive at conclusions regarding the issues raised in earlier chapters of this study. The assessment is made under four broad headings which contain within them specific conclusions which, in turn, provide a framework within which to understand the recommendations made at the end. These headings are:

i) Trade Union Democracy vs Trade Union Bureaucracy: The response of PPWAWU to these initiatives by management is discussed in relation to the theories of Weber and Michels on bureaucracy and oligarchy respectively. The main conclusion in this section is that the response of PPWAWU refutes these theories and calls for a more rigorous approach which captures the dynamics of union action and governance.

ii) Worker Participation as Radical Reform: This section concludes that all initiatives for change at the workplace, whether they emanate from management or the union and its members, always present opportunities for struggle by the union and its members which could lead to some reforms and, in some cases, could even lay the foundation

for more radical changes in favour of labour. At the same time, such initiatives hold dangers for labour. For the union to achieve its goals, the capacity of its members and structures become crucial.

iii) Transition and Trade Union Capacity: This discussion is intended to underpin the recommendations which are made in the last section. It draws on material already presented in previous chapters to assess PPWAWU's capacity to develop a strategy on workplace democratisation. The key conclusion in this chapter is that PPWAWU does not have the capacity to engage successfully in the workplace. This lack runs through all the levels of the union from the membership on the shopfloor to the national leadership at the head office.

iv) Recommendations: The last section of this chapter suggests a set of recommendations which could open up opportunities for a more coherent strategy for PPWAWU and the trade union movement as a whole on the subject covered in this study. These recommendations are on: responding to employer strategies on the shopfloor, union initiatives for shopfloor democratisation, re-organisation of union structures and the building of capacity to meet these challenges.

2. Bureaucracy versus Democracy

This study has raised key theoretical questions about the nature of democracy and decision-making in trade unions. In this thesis it is argued that, given the particular history and entrenched democratic traditions and practices of the post-1973 independent unions in South Africa, it is unlikely that union response to participatory management and other shopfloor initiatives by management will take a bureaucratic or oligarchic form as predicted by Weber and Michels. The independent trade union movement's emphasis on worker control, democratic decision-making and the primacy given to shopfloor rank-and-file membership in policy formulation offer opportunities for a more dynamic union strategy and response. This response would be the result of democratic participation by and interaction between the various structures of the union from the shopfloor upwards - rank and file members, shop

stewards, branch structures and branch officials and national structures and officials.

2.1 Weber and the Notion of Bureaucratization:

Research conducted for this study has found that PPWAWU's response to participatory management was not a bureaucratic response by the leadership. Contrary to Weber's assertion that modern mass democracy, and the bureaucratization that necessarily accompanies it, limits the influence of the *demos* in direct policy making, the two factory studies in this research seem to suggest that in mass organisations policy and policy formulation are always contested terrains. While a tendency towards bureaucratization (in the sense of standardization and regularization of the exercise of leadership and government) may seem to limit the participation by the rank and file in policy making, there is also an ongoing struggle by the rank and file to increase their influence in policy making. This challenges Weber's notion of an inevitable diminution of the masses' role in decision-making and the ever-increasing power of the leadership.

Instead this study points to an ongoing contestation between various layers of leadership and between the leadership and the rank and file. That struggle becomes more intense where immediate bread and butter issues are involved. Thus at PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil, once the workers had determined that the management-initiated change processes might involve some material gains, they decided that there was a direct role for them. This belief by South African workers, particularly those organised under the unions which emerged in the 1970s, found great encouragement in the principles which underpinned the tradition of worker control and democratic decision-making inside the union, namely mandating and report-backs. Whenever organised workers believed they had a role to play in shaping a particular policy or policies, they would invoke these principles. Mthembu (Mdluli), the PG Bison full-time shop steward in the Wits region explained the reaction of the workers after they were told that the national union had suspended TPQ:

> (W)hat happened is that most of the workers did not accept the suspension. They went ahead. So, us as the shop stewards also went ahead with what had already started within our company because some [workers] asked us who gave us the mandate to go and suspend the whole process because no one had mandated us to do that. Because it

was something which was nice which came from management.[1]

It was found that rank and file union members have the capacity to think, evaluate policies and thereafter act in a matter they deem appropriate. This gives union members the ability to contest issues and policies that they do not agree with. This ability to contest issues is a product of organised workers' experience of union action and struggle and is capable of being adapted to a changing context. It was this experience which enabled workers to contest management's notions of participation. Eventually workers began to develop their own notions of what the content of participation should be. These new notions of worker participation constituted a very crucial intervention by the workers themselves in policy formulation within their own trade union.

Union members' capacity for independent conceptualisation is overlooked in most the literature on trade union organisation and governance. This thesis refutes the notion that workers in trade unions are necessarily passive, apathetic, demobilised or otherwise absent from policy debates within their organisations.

2.2 Michels and the 'Iron Law of Oligarchy':

This study also set out to examine the validity or otherwise of Michels' assertion that there are immanent oligarchic tendencies in every human organisation, and whether the notion of an oligarchy is a useful one to explain the way PPWAWU has been responding to workplace change in general and participatory management in particular. Evidence from the two factories would seem to refute the notion of an oligarchy as well the view that union members are ignorant, apathetic and timid. One of the key findings of this study is that the response of the union was not just one of 'either' the union officials and national leadership 'or' the union membership playing a leading role. As has been shown in chapter 3 the response took on a dynamic character and went through three stages or phases as follows:

Phase One:

This was a phase of tension and contestation between the national union and its shopfloor membership. The union membership favoured involvement in participatory management

while the union favoured obstructive methods.

Phase Two:

This was a phase where both sides began shifting towards a compromise. The workforce changed from enthusiastic support to rejection while the union was forced by circumstances to rethink its hardline strategy.

Phase Three:

This is where the union and its membership are at the present moment. A consensus has been reached between the two sides that it is important for PPWAWU to become centrally involved in order to promote the interests of the workers.

Thus this study had found that both the national leadership and the rank and file union membership had an input in and played a vital part in shaping the way in which the union responded to participatory management. This response by PPWAWU has been, and is still, evolving from unstrategic and often contradictory reactive responses by workers and the leadership, which created serious tensions between the various tiers of leadership and between various structures of the union, towards a more coherent approach which demonstrates a growing consensus between various tiers of leadership and between the various structures of the union.

Thus both Weber and Michels ignore the role of the rank-and-file membership in shaping policy. They also fail to take account of the countervailing forces which mediate the relationship between the leadership and the rank and file membership in an organisation.[2]

The above conclusion is significant not only in relation to the specific issue discussed in this study, namely participatory management, but it also has implications for the way we understand democratic decision-making in a social movement. Decision-making in a social movement like a trade union, particularly in times of rapid change and transition, is never determined just by the leadership to the exclusion of the rank-and-file. Decision-making in such circumstances is always the outcome of a dynamic process of interaction and

participation by both the leadership and the rank-and-file membership.

The above is not intended to dispute the fact that certain elements of the leadership, at all levels, may at particular times exhibit interests which are in conflict with those of the rank and file. Such interests may purport to be for the good of the organisation as a whole, as was the case with the national leadership of PPWAWU when they argued against PG Bison's TPQ. There may also be instances when certain elements in leadership act in ways which seek to advance their personal interests. This was particularly evident at PG Bison where the shop stewards became increasingly alienated from the rank and file and moved closer to management because only in this way could they win certain advantages and privileges as the leadership of the workers. An interesting feature of both management-initiated programmes is the fact that management first targeted the shop stewards. Attempts to win them over to the management perspective included 'bosberaade' or workshops at venues which exposed them to a lifestyle of relative comfort. This led to the shop stewards developing interests which were different from those of the workforce.

But evidence from the PPWAWU study shows that in both instances, the views and interests of leadership are not always guaranteed success because decision-making in a trade union, particularly the independent trade unions in South Africa, is always a process of contestation between the leaders and the led. In response to the national leadership the rank-and-file *disobeyed* their union and became involved in the change processes. In taking this position the workers enjoyed the support of, and were encouraged by, certain elements within their shopfloor leadership, the shop stewards. However, when it became clear to the rank and file that the processes were not delivering as promised and when it became apparent that certain shop stewards were supporting the processes for personal gain, the workers also rejected the processes and those shop stewards who were seen to be 'selling out'.

3 Worker Participation as Radical Reform:

A fear often raised by branch and national unionists, particularly in the initial stages of the change process at PG Bison, and by some workers more recently, is that participation

strategies initiated by management hold the danger of co-opting workers and their shop stewards and undermining the union. Experiences like those of PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil, in particular, confirmed these fears among some unionists because, contrary to claims by management, employer-initiated change processes offered very little participation for the workforce. These programmes were largely oriented towards company goals, particularly greater efficiency and productivity improvement. This orientation was made explicit in both the theory and the practice of these programmes. At PG Bison even the name 'Total Productivity and Quality' was consistent with the goals of management. In both cases the promise of participation by workers in decision-making, a demand which had originated in the labour movement at the height of mass mobilization campaigns in the 1980s, was used as a bait to get the workforce to co-operate in achieving these goals. For many workers the notion of participation in decision-making, both at the point of production and at firm level, held out the hope of bringing Taylorist control of production by management to an end. The programmes initiated by management also promised other improvements to the workers' conditions including better wages, productivity incentives, equal pay for equal work, an end to discrimination, adult basic education and assistance with housing and the education of dependents.

The main thrust of the programmes was productivity improvement, an objective which management pursued vigorously. But management failed to deliver on their promises to improve conditions and address workers' grievances. When the workers realised that the promised benefits and improvements to working conditions were not going to materialise, they rejected the processes. This rejection, however, did not derive from dissatisfaction with the strategy or content of the processes, but because they felt management had reneged on their promises to make improvements. The workers were not concerned with the flaws in the strategy, they were more concerned about what they thought they could get out of it. In the words of a PG Bison worker,

> The objectives of TPQ were good. The people at [PG Bison] head office had good intentions. But Piet Retief management applied it in a way that made the workers to reject it.[3]

How then, should workers and their unions respond to these strategies or rather, how should trade unions and their members approach the question of workplace democratisation? Within PPWAWU there is an emerging consensus between workers and the leadership that participation must deliver material benefits and meaningful autonomy for workers in the labour process and that it must not contradict the union's radical objectives for the future. There is a growing acceptance in the union that worker participation is, like other strategies used by the union in the past and at present, a reformist strategy which could win certain victories for the workers. This acceptance is based on an appreciation of the fact that a reformist strategy like worker participation does not necessarily lead to co-option nor does it also necessarily lead to radical change. In other words, worker participation is not incompatible with the union's long-term objectives for radical transformation and change on the shopfloor and in society more broadly, provided the union and its members engage management at all times by making demands for change which will be in the interests of the union and its members. This is the notion of radical reform which Adler and Webster have used to analyse the role of labour in the transition to democracy.[4]

As argued earlier in this thesis, the notion of radical reform helps us avoid the dualism identified by Cressey and MacInnes in debates about industrial democracy where worker participation schemes are seen in terms of either the 'incorporationist' or the 'advance of labour' approach. The concept also helps us acknowledge that in the workplace there is always what Cressey and MacInnes have termed the 'material space for struggle'[5]. In other words, in the workplace the co-option or the triumph of labour is not an inevitable consequence of any change process. Thus all initiatives for change, whether they emanate in management or in the union and its members, always present opportunities for struggle by the union and its members which could lead to some reforms and, in some cases, even lay the foundation for more radical changes in favour of labour. At the same time, these initiatives also hold dangers which could result in serious setbacks for labour.

The notion of radical reform has implications for the way unions approach the question of participation and workplace democratisation. It also raises important questions about the capacity that the union needs to build for the success of a union strategy on these issues. The

remainder of this chapter is devoted to discussing and making general and specific recommendations on four areas which have a direct relevance to the issues discussed in this thesis, namely,

a) how the union responds to management-initiated programmes of participation;
b) how the union should develop policy which would then serve as the basis of a union proposal for workplace democratisation;
c) re-organisation of union structures in such a way that they are capable of meeting these challenges; and
d) building the capacity of union structures at all levels to meet these challenges.

But before addressing recommendations a), b) and c), this chapter will first discuss and make recommendations on the question of capacity building within the union. This is a theme which runs through this entire thesis and it is therefore pertinent that some issues be raised to underline the importance of union's capacity for the success of the other recommendations made in this chapter.

4. Transition and Trade Union Capacity:

The research points to a serious lack of capacity by PPWAWU to deal with participatory management in particular, and workplace restructuring in general. The following discussion on PPWAWU's lack of capacity is intended to provide a context within which to understand the union's overall response to management-initiated participation schemes at both PG Bison and Nampak. It is also intended to highlight the importance of capacity building for the success of any strategy the union may try to implement. The context can briefly be summed up as follows: participatory management strategies and workplace change in general are occurring because of South Africa's transition to democracy and the accompanying exposure to global competition. In most instances these changes have been very complex and have put severe strains on the material and organisational resources of PPWAWU.

Over the last two decades the independent trade union movement in South Africa became one

of the prime agents of change towards a democratic dispensation. This contribution was not confined to shopfloor struggles to improve the conditions of union members. Unions also played a leading role in struggles for change in the broader society. The trade unions' organising strategy of factory-by-factory recruiting, building structures from the factory upwards, leadership accountability, the winning of incremental victories for the members on shopfloor issues and mass mobilization strategies produced one of the strongest movements in this country's and, indeed, the developing world's history. By the mid- to late-1980s the influence of the independent trade union movement, particularly the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), had grown to such and extent that neither the employers nor the state could ignore it. Not only did the movement possess the capacity to challenge employers on the shopfloor, but it also proved itself capable of confronting the state and winning important victories, like the struggle to reverse the 1988 amendments to the Labour Relations Act.

However, since the beginning of the transition to democracy at the beginning of this decade unionists and other labour commentators have lamented the increasing lack of capacity in the union movement to deal with new challenges under the transition.[6] However, this study maintains that although most of these problems began to manifest themselves more openly during the era of transition to democracy, many of them, particularly poor administration, weak finances, poor quality of leadership, poor quality of service to members, high staff turnover and weak union education and training, have their roots in the pre-transition period.[7] These problems were evident long before the transition. The difference now is that the political context in which unions operate is changing rapidly resulting in a new set of conditions in which labour and capital have to operate. The transition to democracy has put enormous pressures on the resources of trade unions thus bringing old weaknesses out into the open. But, more than that, it has brought with it even more complex issues which not only demand a rethink of strategies and approach by the union movement but require greater skill and sophistication, additional resources and organisational strength and efficiency. One of the new issues thrown up by the transition and which challenges unions to come up with new strategies is participatory management, a term used to denote a variety of management-initiated change processes which seek to restructure workplace relations and claim to concede

decision-making powers to the workforce.

Debates in the union movement reflect an appreciation of the need to adjust to the challenges of the transition and the advent of global competitiveness. For example, COSATU's 'back to basics' debate is not oblivious to the fact that unions operate under changed political and economic circumstances. Rather, it is an attempt to,

> (R)eturn to fundamental values and practices, reconnecting with the grassroots and reworking basic democratic and organisational practices.[8]

One of COSATU's goals is to "look seriously at rebuilding the capacity of our organisation and empowering the workers to exercise power".[9] However, it will take time for unions to come fully to grips with the changes of the transition and develop new strategies to meet new challenges. A major mistake of the trade union movement was its failure to anticipate some of the changes that were going to result from the success of some of its own struggles and campaigns, particularly at the shopfloor level. This weakness began to manifest itself more starkly when the state started introducing political reforms and employers started embarking on certain 'change processes' on the shopfloor. For the first time in many years management in a number of companies began to take the initiative away from the trade unions thus forcing them to respond to new strategies. Not only did these developments stretch the unions' already limited resources, but they also revealed for the first time a lack of capacity on the part of the union movement in general to engage management effectively.

Up until 1990/91 debates within and outside the labour movement never concerned themselves with building capacity within the movement. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that during the era of resistance unions, and other mass organisations, were more concerned with destroying the system of apartheid than with building a new one in its place. On the shopfloor this meant opposing and/or obstructing employer plans, demanding improvements to wages and conditions and fighting racial discrimination on the shopfloor. The capacities needed to achieve these were few and simple - agitation, basic negotiation and mass mobilisation. A union's strength was judged more by the militancy of its membership

and the number of strikes taken by its members on the shopfloor than by the number of proposals it made to initiate new changes on the shopfloor. As PPWAWU's 1989 Annual Report observed on the state of organisation on the shopfloor,

> Factory structures are the foundation of our union. This refers to the general membership and shop stewards committees. The test of strength for these is their ability to fight exploitation and oppression at the factory floor, as well as the ability to take solidarity action and to respond positively to national calls (like the call for protest action on the 5 - 6 September). In this respect we must be proud that our membership have shown themselves to be strong and willing to fight.[10]

The situation began to change from late 1989 onwards when some employers began introducing new strategies and changes which required less agitation and resistance, and more co-operation and engagement by the unions. Activists within and outside the labour movement began to lament the 'lack of capacity to deal with complex issues'.[11]

Lloyd (1994) argues that although the struggle against apartheid produced a type of unionism that was very successful in "mass political struggle and simple wage/conditions negotiations", this history "did not equip the officials and members for the challenges of re-emergence into the mainstream world economy".[12] This point can be taken further to argue that the history and struggle of the trade union movement did *not* equip the unions to deal with new issues in a democratic society.

However, the above by no means suggests that there has been a complete turn-around in the balance of power on the shopfloor. There are important continuities from the era of resistance which ensure that unions are still in a relatively powerful position. The strategies which unions have applied with remarkable success in the past are an important resource which unions will continue to use or draw on when circumstances require it.

Although the lack capacity is a recurring theme in trade union discussions and general debates within and outside the trade union movement, little has been done to understand it fully. Moreover, these debates often use the concept to grapple with problems at national union level rather than those at lower levels of the union, particularly the shopfloor. This

section seeks to discuss the concept in general as well as apply it to the shopfloor situation with a view to identifying areas for capacity building.

Baskin (1991) was the first to raise issues of capacity in the union movement. He identified three areas, namely, inadequate or non-existent education and training, constitutional structures which are not appropriate to meet the challenges of the 1990s and lack of professionalism.[13] The debate gained momentum with the publication of two articles in the South African Labour Bulletin in 1992. Marie (1992) pointed to 'major economic and political shifts' that had occurred between the period of the 1970s to the 1990s, and concluded that "union organisation that grew in this period was not only an agent of change but subject to changes itself".[14] He pointed to a growing complexity of issues and organisational structures with the effect that the unions' organisational infrastructure, resources, skills and staff were getting severely overstretched. Coupled with this was a growing sophistication in employer strategies to deal with the unions.

Keet (1992) approached the issue by discussing the pressures and complex issues facing shop stewards in the trade union movement, and how these factors impose limits to democratic worker control in unions. Not only did she identify a shortage of skills and inadequate training for shop stewards, but she also pointed to a phenomenon that has grown since 1992, namely, the recruitment of strong and skilled shop stewards by management.[15]

Since 1992 the debate has gained momentum and more areas where the unions lack capacity have been identified. However, the fact that the problems continue to grow and unions continue to lose capacity could be due to the fact that not enough attention has been paid to developing a holistic perspective of union capacity so that solutions can emerge from a clear identification of the problem areas. The few contributions which have attempted this have been inadequate and still tend to see capacity as only a problem at the national level of trade unions. Baskin (1993) defines the problem as a 'low level of technical competence' on the one hand and problems of 'organisational inefficiency', on the other.[16] Unfortunately his definition is limited in that it does not capture the full nature and extent of the problems faced by unions and he does not devote much time to elaborating on these aspects of union capacity

that he has identified.

In the union movement, capacity generally refers to the overall capability or competence to deal with or engage in particular activities and/or issues which are of critical importance to the organisation, running and sustaining of the union movement's strength in relation to employers and the state. Such a capability depends on structures, processes and human and material resources available to the union/s to achieve its goals. As the social, political and economic situation of a country changes, whether as a result of the struggles of the labour movement or not, the need for the labour movement to respond to issues more strategically and with greater sophistication increases. This also implies that the organisational capabilities of the movement have to grow to meet these new challenges. Thus a lack of capacity does not only refer to low levels of technical competence or lack of organisational efficiency as Baskin argues. It also refers to the absence or lack of the means to achieve that competence and efficiency. For example, a union that lacks funds to train its shop stewards and full-time officials will find itself lacking in capabilities to achieve its objectives.

The purpose of focusing on the shopfloor is to highlight the centrality of shopfloor structures, particularly shop stewards in any efforts to strengthen the trade union movement. Very often debates on these issues tend to overlook this level of the union in favour of national structures, with the risk that solutions coming out of those debates could become bureaucratic or technocratic, thus marginalising shopfloor structures. The danger of this is that the vital question of revitalising the union to enable it to achieve its objectives in a changed context could be ignored. However, an attempt has been made later in this section to contextualise union capacity by looking at PPWAWU as a national union.

A number of areas in which PPWAWU lacks capacity were identified during this research. These are discussed in some detail below but it is important to mention some of them here for the purpose of providing a background to the recommendations made in this concluding part of this thesis.

Before PG Bison and Nampak came up with their change processes the union and its

members were able to engage management very effectively on the shopfloor. This engagement was around making demands and engaging in mass action to improve wages and working conditions and in defending workers' rights on the shopfloor. Year after year the union would make demands to management on the same issues or would defend members against the same sort of unfair practices by management. The union and its members had become adept at using strategies developed over a long period of time. But little education and training were provided for worker representatives and union officials on work and work-related issues. Union education in the past tended to focus on politics and broad trade union issues like the duties of shop stewards, negotiating wages and representing workers in disciplinary and grievance cases. This education was appropriate for conditions at the time, namely fighting against autocratic workplace regimes and state authoritarianism. Sipho Kubheka, a former general secretary of PPWAWU and now an official at the head office, explains that the union is a newcomer to shopfloor production issues:

> We were focusing on political issues, apartheid in the work situation....We were not focusing on improving production, the quality of production, ensuring that next year more workers will be employed by doing ABC. That was not our focus. Our focus was, firstly, defending the current jobs, secondly, improving the wages of the members from time to time. So those were the kinds of demands we were making. We were not making demands around production.[17]

With the new change processes and management's attempts to position themselves for international competition the bargaining agenda changed and for the first time the union found itself unable to engage effectively and confidently on certain issues. As has been shown in the last chapters the union found that it did not have the capacity to engage in or deal with the following areas or issues:

i) It did not have a strategy to respond to or make proposals on issues like shopfloor restructuring and new management strategies like participatory management;

ii) It lacked the personnel and the expertise to do research and make proposals on these issues;

iii) It was unable to negotiate changes and monitor implementation of agreements reached;

iv) It was unable to co-ordinate a uniform response by its members at different companies and factories;

v) It failed to advise and provide a back-up service to its members to engage in new management strategies;

vi) It failed to educate members and shop stewards so that they could develop strategies and engage management on change processes;

vii) Most full time union officials did not have an understanding of the issues involved;

viii) There was (and still is) poor information flow in the union with the result that higher union structures had no information on which to base their decisions on these new issues;

ix) There is a shortage of financial resources to undertake skills training for officials and worker leadership.

4.1 Union Members

One of the areas where PPWAWU needs capacity is on the shopfloor, among its members and shop stewards. Union members and shop stewards are always the first to be called upon to respond to new management initiatives and they are the ones who stand to gain or lose by those initiatives. They are also expected to engage in debates about shopfloor issues as well as broader issues about their industries, labour market policy issues, the economy or politics, and feed back to higher structures of the union. Yet they do not have the necessary expertise to enable them to engage meaningfully and effectively in new management initiatives on the shopfloor or in broader issues beyond the shopfloor.

The survey of PPWAWU members at the PG Bison and Nampak Polyfoil showed a very strong loyalty to the union. However, the union has not done enough to transform this support and loyalty into capacity among its members to become actively involved in policy issues. There are no formal union education or training programmes for members, as opposed to shop stewards, on the shopfloor. The only time that the entire membership at the factory gets actively involved in the union is during the annual negotiations when members discuss wage proposals, attend general meetings to receive reports or give new mandates and when they take action should the need arise. The only other time when members get involved is when

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they participate in national mass actions called by COSATU or when they take action in support of a grievance. But both these latter cases are rare.

What the above indicates then is that the main link between union members on the shopfloor and their union is wage negotiation. Union members do not have the skills to engage in complex discussions about shopfloor policy issues, let alone broader economic and political issues. With many companies embarking on restructuring, particularly on the shopfloor, the need for union engagement on the shopfloor is likely to become greater. These issues highlight two problems facing the union on the shopfloor. Firstly, there is a lack of skills among union members as stated above. Secondly, the model of shopfloor unionism where union members elect shop stewards to represent them to management on wages, conditions of employment, grievances and disciplinary procedures is becoming inadequate to meet new needs and challenges. The shop stewards committee and the members' general meeting were very effective in the era of resistance but they were never geared to deal with production issues.

Thus in production union members remained individuals and the union had no structures at this level. Union members, even in the best organised factory, had to submit to the authority and control of management and the union had no structure to intervene on behalf of its members. Local, branch and national officials of the union, on the other hand, remained ignorant about the situation of workers in production. This is made worse by the poor flow of information regarding these issues between the union office and higher union leadership structures on the one hand, and the union membership on the shop floor on the other.[18] This distance of union structures from production often leads to serious tensions between the leadership and rank and file membership, like those which characterised the relationship between the membership and leadership in the early phases of the union's response to participatory management at PG Bison and Nampak.

Management at both companies have, at different times but especially when they introduced their change processes, exploited the union branch and national leadership's distance from, and lack of knowledge about production issues as well as the lack of skills among union

members to deal with complex strategic issues. Whereas in ordinary collective bargaining issues management must negotiate with workers collectively and therefore involve the union office and union officials, in the case of the change processes they approached the members directly and left the union out until they had gained an acceptance of their plans from the workers. Management targeted workers as individuals and groups in production (for example, work teams) and this was beneath the lowest level of union structures. The 'change processes' were presented as programmes to improve the lot of the workers by addressing the workers' long-standing grievances. Not only did management get acceptance of these programmes but they also managed, albeit only for a short while, to re-establish their credibility and managerial authority among the workforce.

More importantly, by taking the initiative to introduce these programmes management was also able to set the parameters within which change had to take place on the shopfloor. In other words, the change processes they introduced were premised on an acceptance, rather than a challenge, by workers of the managerial prerogative, and of the imperatives of productivity, and the survival of the firm and the entire system of capitalism. Thus management had ensured that debates on the shopfloor did not go far beyond these parameters and that the union leadership would react to the management's proposals rather than come up with proposals of their own.

Why is it that management succeeded in getting worker acceptance of programmes which contradict union policies or about which the union's leadership has serious misgivings? Also, why is it often the case that union policies or strategies are either not known to or not accepted by union members on the shopfloor? Answers to these questions highlight some of the important capacity problems of PPWAWU on the shopfloor. These are that,

a) Strategy and policy issues, particularly under conditions of globalisation and transition, are complex and members do not have the necessary skills, high standards of formal education and experience to engage in them.

b) The union has neglected membership training to build this capacity among its

members.

c) When management introduces new initiatives on the shopfloor they always incorporate some bread and butter demands (like bonuses, housing schemes, etc) and grievances of the workforce in order to gain their consent to more fundamental changes. In deciding whether to accept such initiatives union members tend to focus more on bread and butter issues rather than on subtle and complex policy issues.

d) Union policies on shopfloor issues, like those on participation, training and restructuring) are often unknown to, and sometimes rejected by workers because they are taken without any input from the workers.[19] Also, once these policies are made they are seldom communicated back to the workers because of administrative problems and poor information flow in the union. But where union members have a direct interest in such policies they do challenge the national leadership and demand to have a say in these policies. At Nampak Polyfoil and PG Bison this is typified by the workers' rejection of national union policies and their insistence that the national leadership should take mandates from them.

e) Another factor which hampers union members' ability to engage in long and complex debates about policies on the shopfloor is the fact that there is very little time within which to hold such discussions. Factory general meetings usually do not last longer than an hour, and attendance in these is usually good only during wage negotiations. Coupled with this is a bigger problem, namely, the structural weakness referred to above where the union does not have shopfloor structures located in production.

f) Most union officials, whose duty it is to 'service' membership at factory level do not have an understanding of shopfloor production processes and issues to be able to intervene and advise members appropriately. Apart from the fact that many union organisers are recruited outside of the ranks of the trade union movement, the biggest problem seems to be lack of training and experience on shopfloor production issues. This is because the independent unions were established to fight a defensive struggle

against unfair managerial practices, low wages and poor conditions of service.

g) A factor which is both a cause and a result of the above reasons is the fact that, with the exception of discussions and meetings around wages, conditions and grievances, union members are generally disinterested when it comes to debates on macro policy issues,[20] unless the union demonstrates that such issues are linked to their shopfloor concerns. Only a few activist members and shop stewards become involved in such debates.

Even the arguments by some in the trade union movement that workers have considerable knowledge about production issues[21] does not in itself mean that the union has capacity to become involved in debates on production, industrial restructuring and industrial policies.

The national leadership of PPWAWU acknowledge lack of capacity on the shopfloor to be one of their most serious problems. As Welcome Ntshangase, former national education officer[22] of the union argues,

> What we need is first line leadership that is supposed to give guidance to the workers in the manner in which they participate or engage. Unless we are able to empower our shop stewards with all the necessary skills, the leadership skills, how to read company information, and so on.... it will actually mean that we will still be failing even to give the immediate guidance that I'm referring to. And, we are not able to do that. That's one of the capacity problems.[23]

Lack of capacity for PPWAWU at the shopfloor level is partly a function of lack of education among union members, which has two aspects to it. The one is that formal education standards among union members are generally low. For example, At Nampak Polyfoil only 23% of the union's membership had passed standard eight and 16% had passed standard ten. Similar figures for PG Bison are 27.5% and 5% respectively. The union's inability to organise skilled workers or its reliance on blue collar workers for membership[24] has meant that PPWAWU could not draw in workers with high educational standards. While this reliance on blue collar workers, who are the majority in all workplaces, was an advantage to the union in the past in that these workers constituted the most militant and most loyal members of the

union, it has in some respects now become one of the weaknesses of PPWAWU. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that management in a number of companies are busy poaching even those few workers and shop stewards with decent educational qualifications by means of promotions which are conditional on workers resigning from the union.

The second aspect of lack of education is with regard to the union's own education and training programmes. At the time the research was conducted, PPWAWU was doing very little internal education and training of its shop stewards and nothing at all for its general membership. Even the little that was provided was for a few shop stewards and none of it dealt with shopfloor issues.

Up until now unions have relied on what is generally known as 'servicing' by officials to help members through some of the problems they encounter at work. Servicing means anything from helping shop stewards in negotiating and advising workers on a variety of issues to visiting factories to give workers moral support, convey important union decisions or mobilise for a particular campaign. For many servicing simply means visiting or keeping in touch with workers at a particular factory. There is a belief in PPWAWU (and other unions) that 'servicing' a factory improves the workers' ability and vigilance to deal with all issues on the shopfloor. As a result weakness of union membership is often put down to 'lack of servicing'[25] because 'service' is seen as the solution to lack of capacity.

However, it is debatable whether servicing as it is currently understood can in any way address the capacity problems on the shopfloor as discussed above. Two problems with the concept become evident. Firstly, servicing is so general or vague that it can be anything that a union official does when he/she visits the factory. Given this vagueness the concept does not lend itself to measurement to assess its success in developing quality participation or involvement by the workers. In the past the most reliable way to measure the success of servicing was strike statistics and involvement of workers in mass action campaigns organised by the union or COSATU. But now that has changed. It would seem that in the 1990s union strength will be measured by how a union uses its power strategically (and selectively) and how proactive it is in making proposals and forcing management to negotiate

fundamental changes to benefit its members.

The second problem with the concept of servicing is that most union officials who are expected to service workers have neither the training nor the understanding of the issues, like participation, work re-organisation, etc., to be able to assist workers on shopfloor issues. One shop steward complained about the weakness of union officials in his branch,

> (W)hen you talk to them about serious issues you find that they are too shallow. They can't go deep on that issue.[26]

A similar sentiment was expressed by a shop steward at Nampak Polyfoil,

> I don't think so [that union officials are specialists] because this [change process], sometimes it brings us to the same level. You find that we are on the same level with them on understanding and no one is in a position to give any advice. You find management doing whatever they want.[27]

It is therefore argued that in order for servicing to be a useful capacity building tool on the shopfloor, the concept and the activities it entails should be clearly defined so that their effect is measurable and lends itself to easy assessment. Furthermore, the people who do the servicing, the officials, should be provided with training on shopfloor issues so that they can be able to 'go deep' when workers ask them for advice.

4.2 Shop Stewards

Shop stewards are the first layer of a union's leadership and a crucial link between workers at shopfloor level and union officials, other factories and branch and national structures of the union. Not only are they expected to represent workers in disciplinary cases and grievances and to negotiate on behalf of workers on the shopfloor, they are also expected to attend union meetings at the union office with the responsibility of keeping the union informed of shopfloor developments and feeding back to the workforce. In many factories shop stewards have played the dual role of activist and leader. In order to play this role effectively they need to be well informed and to get good support from the union. Key skills needed by shop

stewards include literacy and numeracy, basic administration, leadership skills, negotiation skills, the ability to read and understand important company documents, basic labour law and analytical skills.

PPWAWU's weakness in both aspects of education puts shop stewards at an extremely disadvantageous situation compared to their negotiating counterparts in management. Management representatives not only come with high formal educational qualifications, but they also undergo regular training to keep them abreast of developments in their fields. In the past this disadvantage did not pose a serious problem for the union because all that worker representatives were concerned about was whether workers wages' were good or poor and whether workers were being treated fairly or unfairly. No sophisticated arguments were needed to win struggles on these issues. The workers' power was the main deciding factor. However, now that both management and the union agree on the need for engagement, co-operation and worker participation, formal skills and sophistication are going to play a much more important role in deciding key issues on the shopfloor. The ILO (1989) has identified examples of some of the areas in which training for worker representatives is of crucial importance. These are, financial and economic matters, company and labour law, personnel policy and conditions, health and safety, business and production management:

> The better they have been trained to deal with such matters, the better the workers' representatives will discharge their duties on boards of directors, supervisory boards or self-management bodies. And of course many of the same subjects are touched on in works councils, and by workers' spokesmen in collective bargaining. The frequent rotation of workers' representatives increases the need for training, as does the low level of education of many of the workers in developing countries.[28]

There is a growing awareness among shop stewards too, that skills and a better understanding of the issues are going to be the main determinants of power and strength for unions on the shopfloor. A PG Bison shop steward complained about the duration and the content of shop stewards' training in the union,

> (Y)ou will find that because the unions are short of funds, time for training is short. Shop stewards are taken to two day courses. But you cannot train for two days and

> stay for the rest of the year or two years. Management train now and then, all the time they are training, going to refresher courses. With us it's just one day shop stewards' training. You are told 'what is a shop steward'. Something that is useless. It is totally irrelevant these days, you know. We should be learning more about business, how a business operates, how do you approach certain skills at work regarding the economy.[29]

Keet has also found that union education and training programmes are inadequate and that many COSATU unions do not have enough personnel to run regular and effective training for their shop stewards.[30] At best union education is ad hoc and reactive. As a NUMSA education official put it,

> Our education is mainly reactive to employers raising issues. We have not yet reached the level where our shop stewards are equipped to take the initiative, to pose questions and demands on management.[31]

Another capacity problem which is a consequence of the lack of education and training among union members and shop stewards is the inability of union shop stewards to handle issues other than negotiating wages, representing workers in disciplinary hearings and handling grievances. At Nampak and PG Bison this weakness became apparent when management introduced their respective change processes. Although the shop stewards were able to sit and discuss the implementation of the processes with management they were clearly doing so from a position of weakness in terms of knowledge and skills. Policy and process issues are by their very nature complex and require very high levels of sophistication and training. In the absence of such training the chances of union members and shop stewards being outmanoeuvred by management will remain high. At Nampak Polyfoil the shop stewards demanded worker involvement in decision-making on all issues involving the company. But when interviewed both the shop stewards and the union officials admitted that they did not have the skills to become involved in decisions dealing with intricate issues in the company, nor could they read or understand company documentation like financial documents and production plans. As one shop steward explained,

> We want the books to be opened so as for us to see what is happening because we do have a problem when it comes to negotiations....But then what we are saying is that

> first there should be training given to individuals so as for them to be in a position of reading whether those figures are correct or not, because we are not familiar with figures. They can put the books and say, 'okay here, we are opening the books'. It's pointless. We do not understand what is actually happening.[32]

It is true that workers and shop stewards have a better understanding of production processes in their factories, companies or industries than the full-time union officials, many of whom have no experience as factory workers.[33] In many cases shop stewards have drawn on this general knowledge and understanding to engage management in important discussions about new changes on the shopfloor even though they do not have the experience and training on those issues. A PG Bison shop steward commented,

> Yes, on this TPQ issue they [union officials] left us alone to do our own thing. As I said, even when union officials were present in meetings to discuss TPQ it always ended up being our issue alone....They were well placed to give us some advice as people who can analyze issues and as people who always handle workers' problems. But in meetings they did not make any input. They were just blank.[34]

But the workers' and shop stewards knowledge of production processes should not be overestimated. While this knowledge is an important building block for the union to use in building its capacity on the shopfloor, it remains very generalised and does not amount to a skill on the part of shop stewards. The ILO has observed that specialised training is very important for worker representatives to enable them to exert influence. Such training is needed not only to equip the representatives with skills to understand the issues under discussion but to also appreciate the effect of the decisions to be taken.[35] In both cases, and by the shop stewards' own admission, there was neither a full grasp of the questions under discussion nor was there a full appreciation of the implications of the decisions taken.

One of the new challenges thrown up by the transition period for unions and their leadership is the need to be more pro-active in their approach to issues generally and on the shopfloor in particular. This is in contrast to union strategies during the resistance era which tended to be reactive or relied on militant abstentionism.[35] Lack of a proactive approach was identified among shop stewards at both factories, but to varying degrees. However, it seems that the

shop stewards committee at PG Bison was not only reactive, but it also did not have the capability to question management on their proposal and begin to pose new questions to advance the workers' interests. Instead what seems to have happened was that the committee accepted management's strategy without question and allowed management to drive a wedge between them and their membership.[37]

Although Nampak Polyfoil shop stewards were also reactive, and often resorted to a strategy of militant abstentionism, it would appear that they also made use of the opportunity provided by the discussions and forums to pose new questions and to sharpen their own arguments in favour of a greater say in decision-making. One such question was that of participation in key decision-making structures at the factory. When they insisted that management should give a clear and detailed commitment to this demand management refused. Thus the change process discussions foundered.

These two examples show different levels of sophistication among the shop stewards of the union, but they are both typical of the union's approach to issues in the past. In both cases the approach was a reactive one. But that kind of approach is totally inadequate today. Unions need to be pro-active, to take the initiative and draw up their own proposals for discussion with management. It is no longer sufficient for shop stewards and the union to just demand participation in decision-making, though this is an important step in the right direction. They need to go beyond raising process issues and begin to define the content of the participation they want. This requires that they spell out an independent programme rather than responding, and making amendments to managements' programme.

Some have argued that the best approach for unions which avoids the dangers of reacting to management is to become centrally involved in plans and restructuring programmes on which management is embarking on the shopfloor.[38] Although such an approach has the potential of increasing the influence of workers in company decision-making it does not in any way overcome capacity problems that the workers and shop stewards are facing. Furthermore, it remains a re-active strategy in that it tries to locate itself within a set of plans which management is implementing. On the shopfloor it holds the danger that shop stewards may

get sucked into a multitude of committees, sub-committees, task forces and forums as was the case at both PG Bison and Polyfoil.[39] At national union level becoming centrally involved in management initiatives without addressing the capacity problems may lead to a few individuals, union officials, acting without the mandate and/or knowledge of members and shop stewards.

Notwithstanding the above capacity problems facing PPWAWU on the shopfloor it is still valid to say that shop stewards constitute a very key layer of leadership in the union and that, despite lack of union training, they do build up a lot of experience and develop very important leadership skills in the course or their work as worker leaders. The union, although the shop stewards may not have the capacity to deal with complex issues like restructuring, work re-organisation, production planning and so on, but it certainly has the capacity to lead its members, to negotiate for improvements in wages and conditions, to defend workers against unfair treatment and, at least to frustrate some of management's initiatives if they do not agree with them.

Management is aware of both the weaknesses and strengths of shop stewards as leaders of the workers. When shop stewards are weak management does not contribute to improve their skills so that they can represent the workforce effectively. Instead, they often try to exploit such weakness in order to consolidate their power and control of the shopfloor. On the other hand, when shop stewards show strong leadership management often attempts to use their leadership skills for the benefit of the company by enticing such shop stewards with promotions. The effect of this is to take away even the little capacity the union has on the shopfloor. Stuart Bigmore, then a production manager at Nampak Polyfoil was expressing what is probably in many managers' minds when he said,

> The shop stewards are where your next level of supervisors come, your next level of managers come. The guy gets into the union, he gets involved, he starts to come under pressure, he starts to come under negotiating power. He starts to learn skills that are totally outside of what his scope was before. And after four to five years he has a gutful of the union and the guy wants to resign. This tends to be mostly the case. But you don't mean that guy is actually a dead loss. In actual fact, that guy is probably the one you should pick up at that stage and put him into a position.[40]

This is precisely what both Nampak and PG Bison management have been doing at various stages and to different degrees. At Polyfoil a long-serving shop steward has been appointed as a 'continuous improvement facilitator' while still serving as a shop steward. This position was specially created for him by management to elicit workers' acceptance of and co-operation in the company's 'world class manufacturing' strategy. Although this particular shop steward has not left the union, the move by Polyfoil management fits into a general pattern within the Nampak group where key union members, particularly shop stewards, are promoted to positions above the union's bargaining unit.

PG Bison's Piet Retief management did not go so far as to promote shop stewards, given the factory's practice of reserving management jobs for whites. But they also tried to tap the skills of key union members and shop stewards by including them in key discussions on TPQ. 'Senior' workers, meaning the few workers with relatively high education, whether they were shop stewards or ordinary union members, were often called into the manager's office and informed about what the company was planning to do and what the manager did not like about the workers' work performance.[41] Management also neutralised the shop stewards by keeping them too busy in informal discussions at secret venues and in small committees discussing various ways of improving worker productivity. The PG Bison strategy did not bear much fruit because the workers soon got suspicious of their shop stewards and eventually removed them.

4.3 The Context: Union Capacity During Transition

The context in which the issues discussed above are taking place is one where PPWAWU, and the entire union movement, are facing serious capacity problems. Since 1990 new issues and challenges, like new management strategies on the shopfloor, the brain drain, the drying up of foreign funding, and so forth, have put enormous pressures on the union movement to develop sophisticated responses and strategies. It is in attempts to develop strategies and responses to these new issues that the union's lack of capacity manifests itself. However, lack of union capacity has its roots in the past.

4.3.1 Strategic Orientation:

PPWAWU's strategic focus in the past was oriented towards four priority areas or goals, namely, recruiting new members, fighting for improvements to wages and conditions, defending their members on the shopfloor and resistance to apartheid. All its resources and efforts were geared towards these primary goals and, despite problems like lack of resources, it managed to develop sufficient capacities and experience at all levels to master these issues. Changes have begun to emerge in the union's strategic approach to issues. Not only is there an acceptance of the need to re-orient the union's strategic focus, for example, the need to intervene more pro-actively on shopfloor issues, but there is also an awareness that a new strategic approach will require some additional capabilities which the union does not posses at the present moment.[42] But in developing new capacities the union will be constrained by a number of factors.

4.3.2 Finances:

This is one of the biggest capacity problems of the union movement today. Finance is the key to capacity building at all levels of the unions. While PPWAWU has been able to carry most of its running costs from funds generated internally, for many years about 90 percent of costs for education and legal activities have been borne by foreign donors.[43] For example, internal funding for the education fund in the years 1993 - 1995 was R90 000, R94 350 and R95 650 respectively. For the same period grants received were R229 664, R335 104 and R15 000.[44] The bulk of grants in all these years has been from international donors. The reason for the rise in the 1994 figure is because of a number of donations towards voter education. The 1995 figure of grants received is an indication that foreign assistance to the union is declining and, viewed against this background of foreign funds drying up, it can be seen that PPWAWU is in a serious position indeed.

4.3.3 Education and Training:

The education problems facing the union on the shopfloor have been discussed above. Many of these problems apply to the union nationally. The union currently employs one education official who is based at the head office and whose job it is to educate and co-ordinate the activities of the union in locals, branches and nationally. Foreign funds that the union

receives are only sufficient to cover a few seminars for a very small number of people per year. There is no structured programme for educating shop stewards and full-time officials, let alone union members. And yet if the union is to succeed in re-orienting its strategic approach it needs to embark on an aggressive education and training programme at all levels.

4.3.4 Personnel:

Skilled and experienced leaders and full-time officials are a very important resource to the trade union movement. Over the years the unions have succeeded in building up a strong corps of unionists who have led the movement through very trying and difficult stages of its development. The irony is that just when the labour movement is poised to reap the fruits of many years of struggle, for example by having a sympathetic government and favourable labour laws which could make conditions much easier for the unions, many of the most experienced union leaders are leaving to follow other careers.[45] In PPWAWU this phenomenon, which union reports refer to as 'staff turnover', started long before the transition. The 1989 Annual Report appealed to the national congress to find a solution,

> As stated above, we are still faced with a problem of high staff turnover....This Congress must look for ways of minimising the high staff turnover. We must also discuss ways for PPWAWU to function effectively regardless of this turnover.[46]

However, since 1989 the turnover has continued unabated. In fact, it is more accurate to describe this phenomenon as the brain drain as most of those who leave are among the most skilled and experienced unionists. The most disturbing manifestation of the brain drain in PPWAWU is the fact that many officials and shop stewards have left the union to join management, including PG Bison and Nampak management.[47] What this represents is a severe capacity loss by the union and a gain by management. One of the reasons for some officials leaving to join management is that management offerers salaries of four times or more the union salary of about R2 500 per month. It is still too early to assess the full implications of this for the balance of power between the union and management, but it is possible that in some respects it will give management an advantage over the union. This would be more so as new organisers are likely to be less experienced and less committed to the movement than the earlier generation of unionists.

4.3.5 Administration and Professionalism:

These issues have been discussed by others in relation to the trade union movement.[48] Lack of proper administrative systems and professionalism have been the union movement's weak points for many years. Baskin (1991) argues that lack of professionalism manifests itself at national, regional and local levels of unions:[49]

> Information systems are inadequate or non-existent. Efficiency is rarely practised, nor is it valued. At local level, organisers and officials are generally forced to rely on their own resources and inventiveness. Those unions which have tried to address these problems have often resorted to bureaucratic solutions, further disempowering both local officials and the general membership.[50]

PPWAWU suffers from these problems to more or less the same degree as the other affiliates of COSATU. The implications go beyond the office or union officials. They affect all in the union from the factory floor upwards. Attempts to build trade union capacity should therefore include attempts to improve administrative systems and information flow and to beef up education and training which will engender a more professional approach to union work. Not only are these important for the normal day to day running of the union, but they are pre-requisites for engaging management on complex issues on the shopfloor.

The lack of capacity in the trade unions is a very complex issue as it results from a number of factors, the most important of which have been highlighted above. Furthermore, the problem does not occur only at one level of a union, it occurs at all levels. Consequently, a solution to the problem should not just seek to address problems emanating from one cause or at one level of the union. Rather unions need to adopt a holistic approach which begins by identifying all the capacity issues before proposing solutions.

The above point is important because capacity building cannot be an ad hoc process. Rather it must be done through a programme which takes account of all the areas which are crucial to the functioning of the union. Finances and education and training are the main areas on which everything else rests in capacity building. Any programme which does not give priority to these is almost certainly bound to fail.

Finally, financial constraints are the major reason why unions are not able to make progress in capacity building, and there is no reason to believe that this situation is suddenly going to change. It is for this reason, but not only for this reason, that a role should be found for both employers and the state. Obviously such a role would not mean that the employers and the state would pay the salaries of union officials or pay the union's telephone bill at the end of the month. For example, for the state this role could be in the form of assisting with funds to set up trade union schools, while the employers could contribute in the form of funds for shop stewards' education, paid training leave for shop stewards and full time shop stewards who would be released for agreed periods to perform union duties on a full-time basis.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Responding to management-initiated programmes of participation

Many companies are likely to follow the example of PG Bison and Nampak by introducing participatory management in their plants. This is going to be more so as many companies are adapting to globalisation and global competition which are often accompanied by the adoption of new production methods and a participatory style of management. As has been shown in this thesis, when management introduces new practices and strategies on the shopfloor, unions come under immense pressure to respond at very short notice. When that happens there is always the danger that the union and its members will adopt strategies which do not accord with their long-term organisational and strategic vision. It is proposed here that the following could help the union avoid some of these dangers and ensure that the union's strategy is beneficial to its members:

a) A union response should seek to use the strategy to open up more opportunities for workers through a strategic involvement in the process. A simple oppositional approach where the union and its members reject the strategy outright should be avoided because it opens up avenues for management to divide union shopfloor structures by enticing certain workers with rewards and isolating the rest. In short, the first proposal is that the union should pursue a strategic engagement which seeks achieve gains for the workers and the union.

b) At the same time, strategic engagement should not mean wholesale acceptance of the management programme. The union should first get the a copy of management' proposal and establish fully what the company proposes to do, the structures and processes that it wants to introduce, the content of the changes envisaged and the roles that management, shopfloor union structures and the local union are expected to play. Once a detailed proposal is provided, the union should ask for time to study the proposal and make proposals of its own for discussion with management. It is likely that management will make proposals for change in the context of a restructuring exercise and that they will argue that speedy action is required. To many workers this may come across as a threat of job loss. But it is very important that the union should argue for reasonable time to study the proposals, consult its membership and finally draw up its own proposals and comments.

c) Consultation between the local/branch union structure and shopfloor union structures is crucial. This study has found that union members have a lot of ideas on a number of changes which could be introduced on the shopfloor.The consultation process could take various forms, including general meetings, research groups to conduct surveys and workshops to brainstorm ideas and proposals. The idea of using research to find out more about management strategies as well as consult union members was successfully used by PPWAWU and SWOP at Nampak in 1994/5.[51] This could be adapted and used by the union in other companies.

d) It is always important that lessons learnt in different companies should be used to build up experience and to serve as the basis of formulating union policy on these strategies. However, even when there is an agreed union policy, such a policy should be applied flexibly in each situation and in each new company workers should be consulted adequately to ensure that they make an input at an early stage of the process.

e) In the final analysis, union involvement should aim at achieving meaningful gains for union members. But there are limitations to this approach because through it the union

remains reactive to what management is doing. In a few cases it may be useful to build up experience and to get workers to debate issues. But in time the union should be able to develop its own independent programme for workplace democratisation. The details of this are discussed in the following section.

5.2 Developing a union programme of workplace democratisation

Ideally, unions should develop and follow their own programmes for workplace democratisation rather than try to accomodate themselves to the programmes and initiatives of management. In practice this would mean that unions would proactively develop policies and make proposals to management which seek to promote their own vision of democratisation of workplace relations. This would then become a union campaign in the same way as centralised bargaining and union control over provident funds.

a) The first step would be a process of drawing lessons from past experiences with employer initiated programmes, like those at PG Bison and Nampak, in order to start a union-wide debate on these issues. At the same time the union would commission research conducted by a team which includes outside researchers as well as PPWAWU members. This research would explore a number of pertinent issues like existing programmes in companies organised by PPWAWU, experiences of other unions, overseas experiences, global trends in the organisation of work, etc. But more importantly such research would play a consultative role by soliciting the views of union membership on work organisation, worker participation and the union's vision of democratisation of workplace relations more generally. In order to have an impact these processes would have to be conceived of as a union campaign rather than something which is divorced from everyday organisational activities.

b) The completion of the research process, which would be done over a specified period of time, would be followed by discussions at workplaces, in local shop stewards councils, branch structures and finally at national level where policy would be adopted. The final outcome would have to result in a broad union vision of democratisisation accompanied by a set of very specific proposals written into a

negotiating document for shop stewards and organisers to use when discussing with management (in a similar way to model recognition agreements in the past which local structures used as guidelines in negotiations).

c) The methods of soliciting views may be adapted to suit conditions in the various branches and locals of the union, but by all means, the process of developing a union strategy on shopfloor democratisation should put a lot of emphasis on consultation and involvement by shopfloor structures in the formulation of strategy. It has been pointed out in this thesis that union members are already developing organic notions of democratisation which the union could use as a building block towards a new vision.

5.3 Re-organisation of union structures to meet these challenges

The above recommendations would necessitate an adjustment by the union in the form of re-organisation of its structures to meet these challenges. Such a re-organisation would be a condition for the sucess of these suategies.

a) On the shopfloor the union needs to ensure that it has structures which are located in production and are placed such that they can make interventions at this level. This could be performed either by existing structures like the shop stewards committees or it could be assigned to specialised committees like health and safety committees and specialised committees to deal with production issues. The union could also explore the possibility of adapting workplace forums to serve this function. The only condition is that such structures should be union-based, as opposed to joint structures with management.

b) At the local and branch levels the functions of full-time officials need to be re-conceptualised in such a way that equal weight is placed on handling production issues and distributive issues (wages and conditions of employment). This would mean a greater division of labour and therefore greater specialisation by full-time officials.

c) The agenda of the local shop stewards council would also have to be restructured in such a way that production-related issues feature more prominently in debates among shop stewards from various factories and companies. In the initial stages of the strategy outlined in 5.2 above, in particular, the local would have to drive the campaign to develop a union vision and monitor/oversee the process of negotiations in plants within its area of jurisdiction.

d) At national level the division of labour among full-time officials and the leadership would have to be restructured in such a way that a new portfolio is created which would focus on issues of production, restructuring and democratisation in companies and in workplaces. Although this portfolio would be separate from the education and organising functions, it would have to work very closely with these two. This portfolio would also be responsible for most of the union's research work and feed such into all levels of the organisation.

5.4 Building union capacity to face the future

All the above are premised on functioning structures which have the capacity to fulfil their obligations. The question of union capacity has been discussed at length in this chapter. Areas of capacity building were suggested, namely, leadership training in strategic planning, financial self-sufficiency, education and training, a sound staff policy and sound administration and a professional approach to union work. Suffice it to say that union education and training would play a pivotal role in developing such capacity.

The issues discussed in this chapter, and indeed in this entire thesis, and the recommendations made above could go a long way towards putting the union on a sound footing to begin to confront the challenges of the future. There are many indications that union struggles in the future will centre around production and the organisation of work on the shopfloor. It is therefore imperative for the labour movement to begin to position itself to face these challenges for the benefit of its members.

ENDNOTES:

1. Interview with Joseph Mthembu (Mdluli), full-time shop steward at PG Bison Germiston, and PPWAWU Wits branch chairperson, June 1994.

2. Hyman, R. (1971) Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism, London: Pluto; Clegg, H.A. (1979) The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Britain, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, and Lipset, S.M., Trow, M. and Coleman, J. (1956) Union Democracy: The Inside Politics of the International Typographical Union, New York: The Free Press; all provide a much more useful approach because they take full account of these countervailing forces.

3. Worker No. 14, PG Bison, Piet Retief.

4. Adler, G. and Webster, E. (1995) "Challenging Transition Theory: The labour movement, radical reform and transition to democracy in South Africa", Politics and Society, 23, 1, 1995.

5. Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980) "Voting for Ford: Industrial Democracy and the Control of Labour", Capital & Class, 11, 1980, p. 20.

6. See for example, Marie, B. (1992) "COSATU faces Crisis: 'Quick fix' methods and organisational contradictions", SALB, 16,5; Keet, D. (1992) "Shop Stewards and Worker Control", SALB, 16,5; Vavi, Z. (1992) "The Name of the Game is Membership", SALB, 16,8; von Holdt, K. (1992) "What is the Future of Labour", SALB, 16,8; von Holdt, K. (1993) "The Challenge of Participation", SALB, 17,3; and Baskin, J. (1993) "Corporatism: Some obstacles facing the South African labour movement", Centre for Policy Studies, Research Report No. 30.

7. Some of the issues were raised in union debates in the 1980s. For example, PPWAWU's 1989 Annual Report dealt with issues like the poor quality of some leadership layers, staff turnover and dependency on foreign funding for core activities like education and training.

8. NALEDI (1994) Unions in Transition: COSATU and the dawn of democracy, Johannesburg: NALEDI, p. 5.

9. COSATU (1994) Secretariat Report to the 5th National Congress, 7 - 10 September 1994, p. 24.

10. PPWAWU, Annual Report, 1989, p. 15.

11. See the articles by Baskin, Keet, Marie and Vavi cited above.

12. Lloyd, C. (1994) Work Organisation and World Class management: A critical guide, Johannesburg: Red Earth/SALB, p. 24.

13. Baskin, J. (1991) Striking Back: A History of COSATU, Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 458.

14. Marie, B. (1992) op. cit., 1992, p. 21.

15. Keet, D. (1992) op. cit., pp. 33 - 34.

16. Baskin, J. (1993) op. cit., p. 11.

17. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, former PPWAWU general secretary, 28 November 1994.

18. Keet, D. (1992) op. cit., p. 36.

19. An example of a situation where a union decision was rejected by or was not known to workers was when the national executive committee of the union took a decision that TPQ at PG Bison should be suspended. Despite that decision workers in all PG Bison plants nationally continued their involvement in the process, either because they rejected the NEC decision or because they were not aware of it.

20. The 1991 Bi-Annual Report noted that, "At our NECs and the last congress we agreed that monthly general meetings should be held at all factories. Unfortunately this has not been happening. General meetings are only held when workers have major problems like wage negotiations, retrenchments or strikes. It is rare to find general meetings discussing how to strengthen PPWAWU, the alliance, Constituent Assembly and Interim government demands, etc." (PPWAWU, 1991: p.10).

21. Interview with Sipho Kubheka.

22. Welcome Ntshangase was the national education officer of the PPWAWU at the time he was interviewed for this research. He has since resigned from the union and joined Nampak management.

23. Interview with Welcome Ntshangase, national education officer of PPWAWU, 3 November 1993.

24. According to Baskin, this is a problem for all for most of the unions which emerged from 1973 onwards. His argument is that the collaboration of all employees is crucial to industrial restructuring. He maintains that such collaboration implies major changes to shopfloor organisation by the unions. "Without the active involvement of workers and skilled employees, the best plans will fail." (Baskin, J. (1993) op. cit., p. 24)

25. PPWAWU, Bi-Annual Report, 1993, p. 3.

26. Interview with Andries Fakude, shop steward, PG Bison, Piet Retief, 11 February 1994.

27. Interview with Themba Tiya,Shop Steward at Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

28. ILO (1989) Worker Participation in Decisions Within Undertakings, Johannesburg: Skotaville, p. 40.

29. Interview with Andries Fakude, Shop Steward at PG Bison Piet Retief.

30. Keet, D. (1992) op. cit., pp. 33 - 34.

31. Jerry Thibedi, NUMSA Regional Education Officer, Northern Transvaal and Highveld, quoted in Keet, D. op. cit., p. 34.

32. Interview with Zimi Masuku, shop stewards' chairperson, Nampak Polyfoil, 24 November 1993.

33. Interview with Sipho Kubheka.

34. Interview with Qoqozulu Mngomezulu, Shop Steward at PG Bison, Piet Retief, February 1994.

35. ILO (1989) op. cit., pp. 39 - 40.

36. Militant abstentionism was discussed in Chapter 4. It was a strategy by unions to refuse to engage in issues on which they felt the balance of power was not in their favour. Although it was a reactive strategy, militant abstentionism was a very effective way of frustrating management (and state) plans and programmes.

37. According to workers and shop stewards at PG Bison, the old shop stewards committee allowed themselves to become transmission belts for management instructions. Not once did they question management on the TPQ process. Instead, they got pulled into secret meetings at venues outside the factory, after which new changes would be made without the knowledge of the workforce. (Interview with Shadrack Mnisi, shop steward at PG Bison)

38. See for example, Ntshangase, W. and Solomons, A. (1993) "Adversarial Participation: A Union Response to participatory management", SALB, 17,4.

39. At both factories task teams or groups and forums were set up to deal with a variety of aspects of the change process with shop stewards and management involved in all of them. Not only did this take up all the time of the shop stewards but it also engendered some kind of 'co-operationism' in which meetings with management, whose discussions were mostly known only to those involved, took priority while workers' grievances were ignored.

40. Interview with Stuart Bigmore, Operations Manager, Nampak Polyfoil, October 1993.

41. Interview with Andries Fakude, shop steward, PG Bison, Piet Retief.

42. Interview with Sipho Kubheka.

43. See PPWAWU Annual Reports, 1989, 1991, 1993.

44. PPWAWU, Audited Financial Report, 1994/95, to Bi-Annual Congress, 22 - 25 June 1995.

45. See NALEDI (1994) op. cit.; Buhlungu, S. (1994a) "COSATU and the Elections", SALB, 18,2, and Buhlungu, S. (1994b) "The Big Brain Drain: Union Officials in the 1990s", SALB, 18,3.

46. PPWAWU Annual Report, 1989, pp. 19 - 20.

47. The 1993 Bi-Annual Report of PPWAWU named Nampak as one of the main culprits who "ruthlessly" use their resources to entice key union leaders into management positions. The report said three PPWAWU officials and several key shop stewards had crossed the floor as a result of this. (1993: 17) More officials and shop stewards have joined the company since the PPWAWU report was written. Today Nampak employs the biggest number of former unionists and political activists (from PPWAWU and other unions) than any other company in the country. They include former shop stewards, branch organisers, a branch secretary, national organisers, a national education officer, an assistant general secretary and a former Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) guerilla.

48. See Marie (1992), Keet (1992), Baskin (1993), Vavi (1992), op. cit.

49. Baskin, J. (1991) op. cit., p. 458.

50. ibid., p. 458.

51. See PPWAWU/SWOP (1994) "Restructuring at Nampak: A Strategy for Worker Involvement", Research Report.

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APPENDIX A:

Questionnaire

SECTION 1: About Yourself

1.1 Your age:.....

1.2 Sex: | MALE | | | FEMALE | |

1.3 Are you married: | YES | | | NO | |

1.4 Number of children:.....

1.5 How many other dependants (eg. parents, grandparents, but excluding children) live with you Number and how they are related to you: .....

.....

1.6 Highest education standard passed:.....

1.7 Technical, skills or other education:.....

1.8 Do you live in *(Tick or Cross)*:

a) Your Own House:	
b) Rented House:	
c) Rented backroom:	
d) Own Shack:	
e) Hostel:	
f) Other: (explain)	

1.9 Does your wife/husband and children live with you?: | YES | | | NO | |

If NO explain:.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION 2: About Your Work

2.1 When did you start working for the company (and service in years).....

2.2 Your department:.....

2.3 What is your present job title:.....

2.4 What is you job grade?:.....

2.5 Describe briefly what you do in your job:.....
.....
.....

2.6 How many hours do you work per day:.....

2.7 If you work shifts what is your shift and times of the shift?:.....
.....

2.8 Did you get any training for this job (explain):.....
.....
.....

2.9 What is your wage per hour:.....

2.10 What would regard as a fair wage (per hour) for the job you do?:.....

2.11 Does your job involve?: *(Tick off or Cross one only)*:

a) Waiting to be given instructions all the time	
b) Getting instructions (supervision) from time to time (but not all the time)	
c) Working without any supervision at all	
d) Supervising others	
e) Other (specify).....	

2.12 If you supervise others state:

a) Number of people who work under you:.....

b) Are relations between you and the people under you GOOD or BAD (explain your answer:.....

2.13 Who is your immediate superior (and his/her position.....
.....

2.14 Relations with your superior:.....

2.15 Are you happy in your job? (explain your answer):.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.16 Do you ever make suggestions to your superior about doing your work better:

Always	
Frequently	
Sometimes	
Never	

2.17 If you make suggestions about doing your work better does your superior, does he/she:

Accept and implement them	
Listen but never implements	
Never wants to take suggestions from you	
Other (specify)	

2.18 Does your superior allow you to stop your work without consulting him/her when there is a problem:

YES	
NO	

If NO explain what happens when there is a breakdown, danger, etc.:

.....

.....

.....

2.19 Working conditions in your department are *(Please tick off or cross one only)*:

Very good	
Good	
Okay	
Bad	
Very bad	

If BAD or VERY BAD explain:.....

.....

.....

SECTION 3: About Your Union

3.1 Are you a member of a union?.....

3.2 What is your union:.....

3.3 When did you join the union (year):.....

3.4 Why did you join the union:.....

.....

.....

3.5 Have you ever stood for election as a shop steward?.....

3.6 Does your trade union give workers power to influence the decisions that management makes about the company?

	YES	NO	Explain your answer
a) Employment and recruitment			.....
b) Finance planning			.....
c) Production planning			.....
d) New technology			.....
e) Retrenchments			.....
f) Discipline eg. dismissals			.....
g) Restructuring			.....
h) Other (specify)			.....

3.7 Has the union helped you to get improvements on items a) to f) below? *(explain your answers):*

a) wages:.....

.....

b) working conditions:.....

.....

c) relations with foremen/supervisors:.....

.....

d) relations with senior managers:.....

.....

e) relations with fellow workers:.....

.....

f) other conditions:.....

.....

3.8 How does the union (shop stewards and organisers) handle negotiations with management? *(Tick off or Cross the correct answer for each of the following statements):*

	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Don't know
a) They call workers and get a mandate before negotiations					
b) All demands to management must first be approved by the workers					
c) They give workers a report-back after negotiations					
d) When there is no agreement they call workers to get a new mandate					

3.9 Has there ever been a time when your shop stewards and union officials made an agreement with management without consulting the workers?

YES	
NO	

If YES, explain:.....

.....

.....

3.10 Do you feel that your shop stewards are always working according to the wishes of the workers when representing the workforce to management and the union?

YES	
NO	

If NO, explain your answer:.....

.....

.....

3.11 How often do you meet your shop steward in your department?.....

SECTION 4: Worker Participation/Industrial Democracy

4.1 In what ways are you ever consulted by management regarding your job?:

.....

.....

.....

4.2 How does management communicate with you regarding your job?:

.....

.....

.....

4.3 Do workers have any say in decisions at the factory?

YES	
NO	

Explain your answer:.....

.....

.....

4.4 Do you agree or disagree with these statements? *(Tick or Cross)*:

	Agree	Disagree
a) Management in our company knows best and should make the company decisions		
b) Management is concerned about the welfare of the workers		
c) Management always consults the workers		
d) Workers have contributed to building the company and should therefore run the company jointly with management		
e) There is no need for management. Workers can and should run the company themselves.		

4.5 Do you think the workplace is being run democratically:

YES	
NO	

If NO, what can be done to make it democratic (3 things):

a) .....

b) .....

c) .....

4.6 Do you know who takes the highest and final decisions about the company?

YES		NO	

If YES, who?:.....

4.7 How often does management ask you for your suggestions before they make decisions about plans or changes in the company?:

All the time	
Frequently	
Sometimes	
Never	

SECTION 5: Your response to Worker Participation

5.1 Which of the following forms of worker participation has management introduced at your company? *(Tick off or Cross)*:

a) Suggestions scheme	
b) Communication schemes/briefing groups	
c) Quality circles/green areas/in-a-groups/other	
d) Value sharing workshops	
e) Worker directors	
f) Joint consultative committees	
g) Joint health and safety committees	
h) Worker trustees on pension/provident funds	
i) Social responsibility schemes or trusts	
j) Literacy and other education forums	
k) Profit-sharing schemes	
l) Other (specify).....	

5.2 Have you been involved in any participation scheme/group/committee at your factory?

YES	
NO	

If YES, explain: .....

.....

5.3 Do you understand how the worker participation structures/committees/groups work at your factory?

YES	
NO	

If YES, explain:.....

.....

.....

.....

5.4 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Management introduced worker participation because *(Tick or Cross)*:

	Agree	Disagree
a) They are sincere about involving workers in decision-making		
b) They have realised that democracy is the only way to run the workplace		
c) They have learnt that all successful companies involve workers indecision-making at the workplac		
d) They want to divide and weaken the union		
e) They just want workers to increase productivity.		
f) They want workers to be loyal to company.		
g) Management has not really changed. This is just one of their tricks to co-opt workers.		

5.5 Did management negotiate or discuss with shop stewards or the union before they implemented worker participation:

YES	
NO	
I DON'T KNOW	

If YES, explain:.....

.....

.....

5.6 Have value-sharing workshops been held at your factory?

YES	
NO	

I DON'T KNOW	

If YES do people in management follow or respect these values?

YES	
NO	
I DON'T KNOW	

5.7 Do workers respect the values?

YES	
NO	
I DON'T KNOW	

5.8 If there are values agreed with management in your company, list three of them:

a).....

b).....

c).....

5.9 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Since the introduction of worker participation *(Tick or Cross)*:

	Agree	Disagree
a) The attitude of management towards workers has improved		
b) Workers are treated better		
c) I now enjoy my job better and can take decisions on how to do it better		
d) Working conditions have improved		
e) Wages have improved		
f) Workers have more say in running the factory		
g) Management talks nicely but no action is taken to improve conditions		
h) I think the process will bring many improvements for workers		

5.10 If you agree with h) above, list three improvements you expect to get:

a) .....

b) .....

c) .....

5.11 Have any special bonuses or financial incentives been introduced with worker participation:

YES	
NO	

If YES, explain how they work:.....

.....

.....

.....

5.12 Does worker participation make shop stewards MORE or LESS accountable to the workforce? (explain your answer):.....

.....

5.13 Has your union ever advised workers to accept or reject worker participation brought by management.

YES	
NO	
I DON'T KNOW	

If YES what reasons did they give for advising you to accept or reject worker participation:.....

.....

.....

5.14 Do you feel there is still a still a need for the union after management introduced participatory management?

YES	
NO	

Explain your answer:.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your help in answering these questions. No one from management, the union or anyone else will see your answers to this questionnaire.

SUMMARY OF PPWAWU STRUCTURES

APPENDIX B

National Level

N.C. - highest body of PPWAWU
- meets once in 2 years
- elects President, 2 Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, General-Secretary & Asst. GS
- considers Annual Report
- can amend constitution
- decides national policies and direction

NEC - supreme body in between NC
- meets every 4 months
- monitors branch progress and problems
- controls finances

NOBC - meets monthly
- manages national affairs of PPWAWU in between NEC
- does work allocated to it by NEC or NC

Branch Level

BC - highest body in every branch
- meets once a year
- elects Chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer and Branch secretary
- gives direction to the branch
- decides branch policy for coming year

BEC - meets monthly
- controls branch finances
- hires and fires organisers
- ensures smooth running of the branch
- monitors local progress and problems
- sends delegates to NEC

Local Level

LC - meets weekly/fortnightly
- calls local general meetings
- assists with organising and factory problems
- helps with education of members and shop stewards
- helps local organiser

Factory Level

SSC - holds factory general meetings
- represents workers in negotiations with management
- sends delegates to BEC and BC
- reports developments in Union to members

NATIONAL CONGRESS (NC)
Branches send 1 worker delegate per 300 members up to 4000 members; and then 1 worker delegate per 500 members.

NATIONAL OFFICE-BEARERS COMMITTEE (NOBC)
5 office-bearers elected at NC plus 2 additional o-b's elected at NC

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC)
5 National o-b's plus branches with:
over 5000 members - 3 delegates
under 5000 members - 2 delegates

BRANCH CONGRESS (BC)
Factories send 1 worker delegate for every 100 members.

BRANCH OFFICE-BEARERS (BOB)
4 office-bearers elected at BC

BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (BEC)
4 branch o-b's plus branches with:
less than 20 factories - 2 delegates per factory
more than 20 factories - 1 delegate per factory.

LOCAL COMMITTEE (LC)
All shop stewards in the area attend.

LOCAL OFFICE-BEARERS
3 office-bearers elected at LC.

SHOP STEWARDS COMMITTEE (SSC)
Elected by the members in every factory for 2 years.

SENIOR SHOP-STEWARDS
Chairperson, vice-chairperson & secretary elected by the ssc.

P.P.W.A.W.U. MEMBERS

APPENDIX C

PGBison

VALUES

AND

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES



INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains the values and objectives of the PG BISON group, as approved by the National Forum on June 10 - 11, 1991. The values should be guiding our present conduct. The objectives are our goals for the future.

Our values form the basis of our daily actions by giving us a clear understanding of what is right and wrong, and how our behaviour should fit in with these principles.

For these values to have meaning, we need to discuss them and use them in our daily lives. We can use these values and objectives to help decide what actions need to be taken to make the work place happier and more productive for everyone.

TPO VALUES

WE BELIEVE THAT:

- Freedom of expression, association, initiative, creativity, and enterprise are necessary for individual success and social stability.
- If you allow people the opportunity and freedom to make decisions they will act responsibly to the best of their ability.
- Human dignity, self-fulfillment and a sense of belonging are necessary for a productive workforce.
- The vast majority of South Africans have the strength and ability to develop into a society that is not inhibited by racial, or any other, prejudice, mistrust or fear.
- Personal needs and aspirations are of greatest importance to the individual, provided that this is not at the expense of others and does not inhibit the creation of wealth.
- A business is only as strong as the contentment, commitment, ability and drive of its employees.
- All people are capable of greater achievement if given training, opportunity and recognition.
- People are best motivated and driven by clear and mutually set goals.
- Business should be conducted in a manner that will serve to improve the environment within which it operates.
- Business serves the society by creating opportunity, employment and wealth.

OUR OBJECTIVES

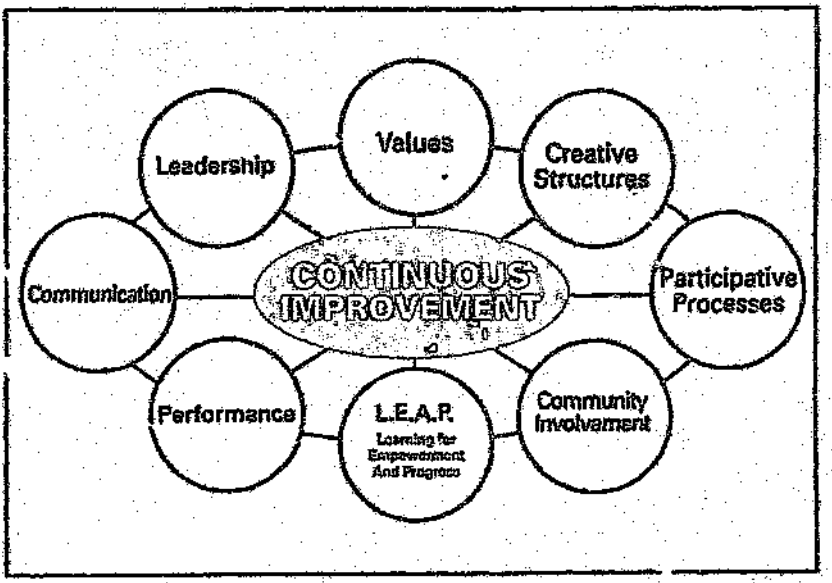
The following statements express the future actions that we seek for PG BISON and its operating companies - Bisonbord, Laminate Industries and PG Wood. These objectives were agreed upon, along with the values, at the National Forum in June 1991.

We are presenting these objectives within the Continuous Improvement model. This model is a useful and clear way of looking at our daily business practices and performance, within our philosophy of Total Productivity and Quality.

The model is in the shape of a wheel, with each area connected to all other areas. This means that we cannot look at one area on its own. For example, we cannot think about performance without seeing how it relates to values, the need for participation and the need to improve our learning opportunities.

We hope that by showing our objectives through the Continuous Improvement model, it will be easier to use this booklet in our daily working lives.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MODEL



STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

CI VALUES

- All employees (management and workers) know of and support the company's values and goals.
- People are all treated equally, with dignity, respect and fairness.
- PG BISON differentiates between retrenchment and redundancy. Redundancy refers to permanent shifts in employment levels due to irreversible shifts in markets, products or technology.
- In the event of redundancy, PG Bison has a negotiated policy to help affected people to minimise the impact through e.g. training for alternative jobs, assistance in finding jobs and severance packages.
- PG BISON does not use retrenchments as a way to manage economic downturns.
- Casual labour can only be recruited for short term needs, for example one week, and not as a tactic for avoiding permanent employment of people.
- Our strategy and planning clearly reflect our values of trust, respect, dignity, information sharing etc.
- We all share in the success and difficulties of our company, such as company-wide pay cuts, rather than retrenchment.
- No racially discriminatory practices or racist language are used in this company.
- There are no facilities reserved, formally or informally, for any race group.
- There are no jobs that are reserved formally or informally for any race group or sex group.
- There is equality of benefits at each job level, subject to negotiations, such as medical aid, pension funds, provident funds, and leave.

- All people regardless of race and sex, doing the same job at similar levels of competence earn the same pay.
- Violation of our company values is treated as a disciplinary offense, that is counselled to correct.

CREATIVE STRUCTURES

- Our organisational structure encourages the easy flow of work and communications.
- Every person at every level within the organisation works as part of a well functioning team.
- Different teams/departments work together and help one another.
- Decision making authority and practices are delegated to lower levels in the organisation.
- All people, In-A-Groups and departments know who their customers and suppliers are, both inside and outside the business.
- Suppliers, manufacturers, distributors and customers all work together to ensure the company's success.
- PG BISON'S practices, processes and structures recognise the interdependence and equal importance of all our stakeholders -employees, managers, customers, suppliers, shareholders, trade unions and community.
- Our company practices our belief that good relationships with the trade unions depend on strong worker representative structures with access to appropriate resources eg. full-time shopstewards, facilities, training.

PARTICIPATIVE PROCESSES

- Our people are always involved in making any decision that affects their work life.
- Management asks the people's opinion, before making any changes.
- We have the skills and values necessary to operate effective and efficient In-A-Groups (eg. group problem solving skills, mutual respect.)
- People are involved in the development and implementation of their own training programs.
- People within departments have a direct say and are involved in the recruitment of managers, peers and team members.
- All employees, whether managers or workers, are directly involved in setting their own performance goals and monitoring their performance improvements.
- People participate and are directly involved in the evaluation of their own, their supervisor's and their manager's performance.
- People readily investigate, suggest, develop and implement new or improved processes, products and services.
- All people have an input into and a desire to maintain the work environment at safe standards.
- People have the authority to carry out the decisions they make.
- All stakeholders work well together to reach common goals.
- The company and trade union work together to meet each other's needs and contribute to one another's strengths and successes.
- Employees and trade unions do not take unilateral actions.
- All of the company's policies eg. literacy, recruitment embargoes, employment practices) are negotiated with the trade unions and employees before implementation.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Business should be conducted in a manner that will serve to improve the environment within which it operates.
- Business serves the society by creating opportunity, employment and wealth.

LEAP

- Literacy programmes are seen as a priority by all people in the company.
- The company looks at the development and promotion of internal people in preference to recruitment from outside.
- Managers and employees regularly discuss the employees' training and development needs.
- People receive ongoing training to fulfill their potential and responsibilities.
- All people are aware of the career opportunities available to them throughout the PG Bison group of companies.
- All employees know their career path, what skills they need and how to develop them.
- All people are aware of their chances of either a managerial or technical career path, both carrying equal status.
- Our management and worker representatives jointly identify and assess people for development potential.

PERFORMANCE

- All employees at all times know and understand the performance requirements of the business, of their work unit and of themselves.
- People are trained and have the correct skills to perform their jobs well.
- All people are involved in measuring their own work performance.
- People are recognised and rewarded for performing their jobs well.
- All employees feel job security and feel that they benefit from the company's performance and growth.
- Everyone in the company knows who uses our products and how they are best used.
- All people understand and know what to do to satisfy their internal and external customer.
- All people know what they need to get from their internal and external suppliers in order to perform their jobs well.
- Improvements in customer service, quality and productivity are important areas of focus of all employees (managers and workers).

COMMUNICATION

- All relationships and negotiations are built upon open sharing of information, mutual trust and respect.
- All people know and understand the common purpose and goals of the team.
- All people know where to get the information they need and how to use it.
- There is openness of information and sharing of ideas regarding performance, between sections and departments.
- All employees receive regular feedback on how well they are doing.
- Every business unit reports to all its people on how it is doing on a regular basis.
- People willingly share information on a regular and informal basis.

LEADERSHIP

- Managers are committed to joint decision making and participation by all members of their team.
- When people have a problem with their work, their managers help/teach them to correct it.
- Managers give regular feedback and share information freely.
- Managers continually delegate responsibility and authority.

APPENDIX D: "RESTRUCTURING" AT NAMPAK

RESTRUCTURING

1. Drive Towards World Class Manufacturing and Service

Nampak's drive towards World Class Manufacturing and Service is a response to an uncompromising demand from customers (local and foreign) for high levels of quality and service and lower prices. There is simply no choice for our operations but to upgrade their technology, structures and cultures to enable them to compete (against local and foreign competition).

The attached diagram gives a 'picture' of some of the processes involved:

(i) Changing our culture in our factories so that all employees understand and are committed to the requirement of value added and customer service principles.

In addition, we need to develop a common code of conduct under which people will operate whilst they are at work, so that the problems of racism, prejudice, victimisation, etc., are removed from the factory floor.

(ii) Reconstructing our structures so that management and workers can deliver their full potential. This involves the setting up of empowered work teams, the disclosure of relevant information, affirmative action, leadership development, high levels of training, etc.

(iii) Developing our technology and technical processes so that they match world standards. This means the purchase and upgrading of machinery and the introduction of new production and engineering processes and systems.

2. Consequences of this World Class Drive

The consequences of this world class drive are, first and foremost, to ensure the company grows and survives (if operations do not embark on this journey they may ultimately not survive and will close down).

Secondly, the quality of work life for employees will be a lot higher with greater levels of involvement, training, information disclosure, recognition and reward. In short, the factory will be a better place to 'live in'.

Thirdly, it will position operations to compete more effectively with current and new competitors.

Fourthly, it will lead to greater levels of innovation by tapping into the potential of worker and manager alike.

Fifthly, in some cases it may mean the disappearance of certain jobs as a result of the introduction of new technology and processes. Jobs could also disappear as a result of restructuring the operation to compete more effectively.

3. The Challenge of Job Loss

In cases where the loss of jobs (not necessarily people) occurs as a consequence of the world class technology initiatives or restructuring, it then becomes the challenge of labour and capital to manage this process:

(i) The trade union and shop floor leadership must be involved at the earliest opportunity (at least three months before the restructuring or technology change takes place) to creatively look at ways of ensuring that employees are not retrenched. The aim should be to try and keep people employed wherever possible. Involvement of trade unions in this process should include disclosure of rationale, economic justification, etc.

(ii) It may be necessary to bring in outside expertise to give a professional view on the restructuring exercise.

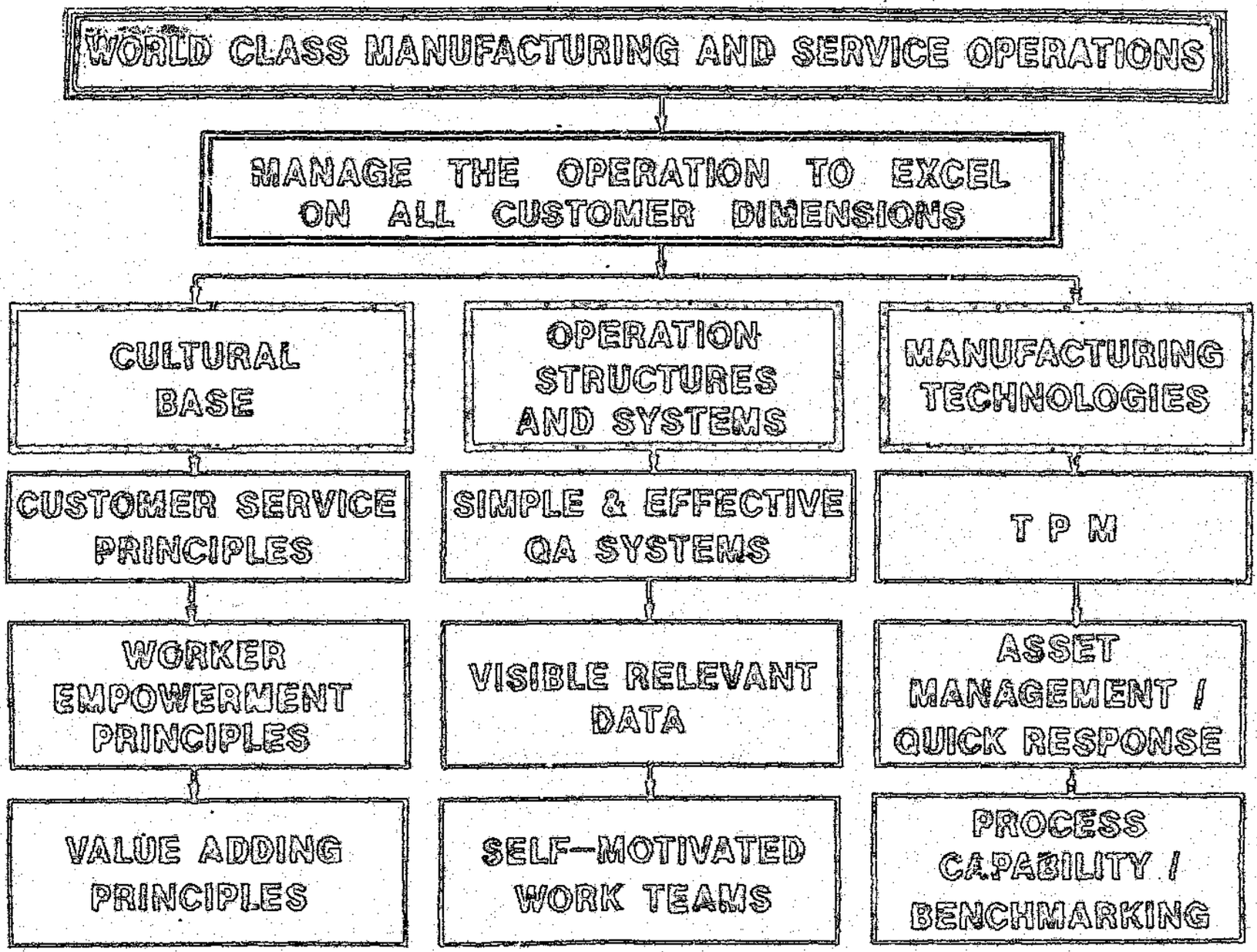
(iii) These creative ways could include joint efforts to reduce costs, increase efficiency, re-skill employees for other job opportunities, etc.

(iv) Where retention of all employees is impossible, then voluntary retrenchment and early retirement should be looked at as an option.

(v) As a last option, negotiated retrenchment should be embarked upon.

(vi) Where retrenchment does take place, the trade union and management should embark upon the joint initiatives of:

- re-training and re-skilling affected employees
- placement of employees elsewhere in the Group or other companies
- setting up of businesses by these employees
- counselling


WORLD CLASS MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE OPERATIONS
MANAGE THE OPERATION TO EXCEL ON ALL CUSTOMER DIMENSIONS
CULTURAL BASE
OPERATION STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS
MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGIES
CUSTOMER SERVICE PRINCIPLES
SIMPLE & EFFECTIVE QA SYSTEMS
T P M
WORKER EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES
VISIBLE RELEVANT DATA
ASSET MANAGEMENT / QUICK RESPONSE
VALUE ADDING PRINCIPLES
SELF-MOTIVATED WORK TEAMS
PROCESS CAPABILITY / BENCHMARKING

52. Mandel, E. (1973) "The Debate on Workers' Control", in Hunnius, G., Garson G.D. and Case, J. (eds) Workers' Control: A Reader on Labor and Social Change, New York: Vintage Books, p. 352.

53. Interview with Sipho Kubheka, PPWAWU head office, 24 November 1994.

54. See for example, Anstey, M. (ed.) (1990) Worker Participation: Concepts and Issues, Kenwyn: Juta; Maree, J. (1991) "Worker Participation: A Case for Co-determination", Indicator SA, 8, 4, Spring 1991; Evans, G. (1992) "Worker Participation at PG Bison", in SA Labour Bulletin, 16, 3.

55. Maree, J. (1991) "Worker Participation: A Case for Co-determination", Indicator SA, 8, 4, Spring 1991, p. 85.

56. Maller, J (1992) op. cit., p. 159.

57. Nicol, M. (1989) "Promoting Participation in ESOPs?", SA Labour Bulletin, 13, 8, February 1989, p. 99.

58. Scannell, R.F. (1992) "Adversary Participation in the Brave New Workplace: Technological Change and the Bakery, Confectionery, and Tobacco Workers' Union", in Adler, G. and Suarez, D. (eds) (1992) Union Voices: Labor's Response to Crisis, New York: State University of New York Press.

59. Banks, A. and Metzgar, J. (1989) "Participating in Management: Union Organising on a New Terrain", Labor Research Review, 14.

60. Scannell, R. F. (1992) op. cit., p. 108.

61. ibid., p. 110.

62. Banks, A. and Metzgar, J. (1989) op. cit., p. 24.

63. See for example, Ntshangase, W. and Solomons, A. (1993) "Adversarial Participation: A Union Response to Participatory Management", in SA Labour Bulletin, 17, 4.

64. An example of this is the way Ntshangase and Solomons posed the key questions facing the union movement - obstruct, let it happen or become centrally involved. The assumption here is that all initiatives will come from management and all the union has to do is react or respond to these initiatives.

65. For a discussion of the concept of alienation see Marx, K. (1978) "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", in Tucker, R.C. (ed.) (1978) The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd edition, New York: W.W.Norton and Co., p. 70 - 81.

66. See Blumberg, P. (1968) op. cit.

67. Cressey, P. and MacInnes, J. (1980) op. cit. p.14, and Maller (1992) op. cit. p. 5.

68. ibid., p. 14.

Author: Buhlungu Maxwell Sakhela.
Name of thesis: Trade union responses to participatory management- a case study.

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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