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The making of the Swazi working class : Challenges to the emergence of a countermovement in Swaziland

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CHAPTER 1

THE WORKING CLASS AND POLITICS IN SWAZILAND

1.1 Introduction

Swaziland is one of the last bastions of royal despotism in Africa as defined by the iron fisted rule by an absolute monarchy. However, the monarchy has been able to use its grip on power and its position as a custodian of Swazi culture and tradition to re-invent itself as a local bourgeoisie (Levin, 1997; Davies, O'Meara & Dlamini, 1985). The country's success in attracting investment, though relatively limited, has led to the emergence of a Swazi working class (Simelane H., 2003). Recent inflows of investment, mainly from Asia, in the textiles industry led to the creation of 40 000 new manufacturing jobs.

This is significant when one considers that Swaziland has a total population of 1 million (Simelane X., 2005). The political significance of this shift in the class structure of Swaziland has to be investigated, particularly when one takes into account that the working class as well as the middle class created by the need for a state bureaucracy, has historically been the loci of resistance to the more despotic elements of the traditionalist regime (Booth, 1983).

The aim of this study was to explore the political impact of the growth of the Swazi working class due to an increase in employment in the textiles industry. The research question that guided the research can be formulated as follows: In light of the growth in employment in the textile industry in Swaziland, what are the prospects of, and possible challenges to the emergence of a countermovement in Swaziland? A case study of TEXREY, a textiles firm situated in the Matsapha industrial site was used to explore this question qualitatively.

These issues are important for a number of reasons. The struggle between the monarchy and the democratization movement in Swaziland is often represented as a struggle between tradition and modernity. Nevertheless, the situation is far more complex than just the two seemingly opposing forces of tradition and modernity, where the institution of the monarchy is seen as 'traditional' and the democratization movement as 'modern'. We have to understand how exactly the political evolution of Swazi society in general and the labour movement in particular is linked to the evolution of the monarchy and the struggles around the entrenchment of royal hegemony. Levin (1991:2) argues that "in Swaziland, the propagation of tradition by King Sobhuza II has been central to the maintenance of royal hegemony", an argument that can be extended to the reign of King Mswati III.

In essence, he argues that in an effort to suppress political dissent and contestation of his power by other political forces, Sobhuza was successful in using the notion of tradition with success. To this day any voice of dissent where royalty is affected is labelled as 'unSwazi'. Later on though, Levin pauses to ask as to what exactly tradition is and how can it be understood. In his final analysis, he argues that in as much as political hegemony is secured through moral and intellectual leadership, in Swaziland it was secured by appealing to narrow nationalist sentiments as underpinned by culture and tradition (Levin, 1991).

Macmillan (1986) warns about the dangers of generalizing and sometimes confusing the notion of tradition and in the process tries to draw a distinction between conservatism and traditionalism. The former could refer to tendencies to resist change and clinging to old habits, whilst the later can be integrated within a changing socio-political environment but with a bias towards traditionalist tendencies.

In this regard, Macmillan argues that after 1960, the notion of traditionalism in Swaziland took the form of exclusive cultural nationalism, and recent observations show that traditionalists are still inclined to use the Swazi/unSwazi tag in suppressing voices of dissent. Prior to this, traditionalism in the Swazi context emerged as an ideology "when

educated members of the elite began to seek out commercial opportunities in the modern sector” (Macmillan, 1986:116). The same ideological distortions were later used to facilitate Sobhuza’s power seizure in 1973¹, and currently it seems it is being used to facilitate capitalist accumulation by the economic elite under Mswati’s rule. However, this also highlights an existing relationship between traditionalists and an emergent local petty bourgeoisie that owes its allegiance to the royal aristocrats.

The collaboration between royalists and capitalists, sometimes through local institutions such as Tibiyo TakaNgwane², contradictory as it can be at times, can lead to the creation of organizational structures in society, especially within the working class, with a potential to contest for and to resist the commodification of its labour. Historically this royal hegemony has been contested, albeit sporadically and in the process forced to adapt itself to industrialization and globalization trends, hence the notion of modernising tradition.

This has led to the establishment of a “bifurcated state” (Mamdani, 1996) characterized by a “dichotomous political structure of traditional and modern institutions” (Levin 1991:2), a space which is constantly negotiated and renegotiated as the Swazi monarchy struggles to maintain its hold on power. Thus, the monarchy uses notions of tradition to justify the fact that Tibiyo is not accountable to the institutions of the Swazi state, whilst at the same time it participates in the growth of a modern capitalist economy in the country.

What are the political implications of the creation of 40 000 new textile jobs? Based on the work of Beverly Silver (2003), Michael Burawoy (2003) and Karl Polanyi (1944), and in light of the above supposition, the research sought to investigate the possibilities of the emergence of a countermovement among these workers in Swaziland that could have the potential to challenge the established political set up as designed by the

¹ In 1973 King Sobhuza suspended the constitution and assumed all judicial, legislative and executive powers

² Investment institutions established by King Sobhuza II that are closely linked and accountable to the royal family. Theoretically, they are owned by the king on behalf of the ‘Swazi Nation’. It does not account to the formal institutions of the state.

institution of the monarchy based on traditionalist and unitarist tendencies. This study is a follow up to an exploratory study done in 2005 focusing on the impact of the monarchy on the Swazi working class, a study which also contested notions propagated by Potholm (1972) that depicts the king and kingship as the personification of a Swazi way of life.

Some of the findings arising from the first research project (2005) revealed that 90% of textile employees interviewed were female, a projection that can reflect the actual gender balance in the broader textile industry. These workers were earning wages as low as R250.00 a month on average, which is way below the R205.50 per week as stipulated in the Regulation of Wages Order of 2004, governing the textile and apparel industry. It was also revealed that most workers maintain their rural background connections thereby raising questions about the concepts of proletarianization and labour commodification. Furthermore, it emerged that the royal regime and by implication the royal family is in control of most sectors of the Swazi economy through various institutions. However, the project also revealed that some workers do hold anti-monarchy sentiments and some of them engage in small scale inner factory struggles on their own, such as pickets (Simelane X., 2005).

The exploratory study focused on issues of structure, i.e. the process of class formation brought about by the growth of the textile industry. As a result, an important rationale for this study was to investigate agency, i.e. the possibilities of these workers and other stakeholders such as trade unions and other civic formations organizing themselves as a serious countermovement that can challenge the regime. Given the rapid growth in textile employment and the specific nature of proletarianization, which can be viewed as partial proletarianization, what then are the possibilities of a countermovement emerging? For purposes of this project, a countermovement will be understood in Polanyian terms to refer to a movement that emerges against labour commodification (Polanyi; 1944).

1.2 Working classes and countermovements

Experts on globalization and labour studies have predicted the end of labour movements due to the impact of globalization. However, others such as Silver have predicted a new emergence of labour movements in the new sites of capitalist investment. Based on the views of both schools of thought, it becomes apparent that globalization has some positive and negative impact on both the working classes and countermovements. The argument for the protagonists of neo-liberal globalization is that at some point in time there will be an economic trickle down to the initial victims of the restructuring process, but the point of contestation between those who are for and those who are against, is the duration of the period before the trickle down begins. Regardless of the trickle down effect or lack of it, those who are against globalization also argue that it brings unfair competition between northern and southern countries; hence Silver (2003) argues that it further exacerbates the north-south divide.

Whilst the above may be true, most authors on globalization seem to ignore the ‘other’ recent divide, i.e. the ‘east-south’ divide, specifically between Asian and African countries. For example, the dismantling of trade barriers has allowed many Asian manufacturing companies, especially in the garment and textile industry to flock into sub-Saharan Africa, and Southern Africa in particular. The aim of this is to take advantage of export opportunities which economically benefit the Eastern countries at the expense of the African countries.

Silver (2003) starts from a premise that when capital organizes a profitable strategy, it produces resistance, generating new strategies of accumulation, and hence new forms of resistance. In essence, she argues, that capitalism migrates as it seeks to maximise its profits in cases where the original markets are saturated and no longer profitable or when labour resistance emerges as its (capital) legitimacy becomes contested. On this basis, Silver (2003) concurs with the Polanyian view of a pendulum swing with regards to capital, labour and civil society. Instead of a shift from commodification to de-

commodification, Silver points out to a shift between a crisis of legitimacy and a crisis of profitability for capital.

The forms of resistance to capital are explained in terms of four fixes (responses), but mainly through the spatial fix. The spatial fix can be understood as a geographical relocation strategy of capital in response to labour resistance and sometimes due to a squeeze in profits. Silver (2003) argues that this resistance either comes in a Marxist way, whereby workers demand a greater share of profits and control of the workplace or in a Polanyian way whereby workers resist the commodification of their labour.

Based on the mobility of capital, she predicts that in future, capital is likely to relocate to countries such as China and Mexico in pursuit of low labour costs, maximum profits and docile labour movements. The auto-industry example provided by Silver (2003) shows a movement by the industry from the United States of America to Europe, Asia then South Africa and Brazil, where similar patterns of resistance emerged. However, recent trends in the textile industry shows a movement from Asia to Africa, hence the argument of the north-south divide as projected by Silver could be extended, although the question still remains if the resistance has been extended?

In a way the phasing out of the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA) and the availability of the Africa Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) has benefited Asian countries at the expense of African countries, hence widening the gap between these continents. Product fix is another key response by capital, which basically occurs when capital engages in new innovative products due to pressure from competitors and the squeezing of profits (Silver, 2003). But it could be argued that even if there is no pressure from competitors, capital would still migrate in search of lower wages and lower labour standards.

This brings us to the question of a 'race to the bottom', a concept that seems to be given credence by developments in the textile industry. Suzan George (2004) argues that the exclusionist nature of globalisation means that only those who adapt to it better, survive, whilst the rest are left behind in further poverty. The rest, usually the so-called third

world countries, then tend to compete on the basis of poor labour standards and inhumane trade liberalisation processes in order to attract foreign investors.

In contesting the notion of a race to the bottom, Burawoy (2003) argues that the idea of nations engaged in a race to the bottom is weakened by the way the account of the spatial fix highlights both the relocation of capital and the relocation of workers bargaining power. He further argues that the crisis of poorer states' inability to meet any demands these days looks different when located in both the cycle of the financial fixes (Burawoy, 2003).

An example of a race to the bottom can be seen in the context of Swaziland whereby Asian textile companies are continuously coming in, looking for cheap labour and the tinkhundla government is gladly co-operating. As much as there are employment legislations in place, international capital has proven that it has the ability to disregard such, as long as the local government is willing to play its part in suppressing any form of resistance.

The theory of a race to the bottom also links to the capitalist idea of international competitiveness, which is basically about a comparison of investment and profitability conditions between countries. In essence, the investor has a platform of choosing what he would view as the 'best' investment conditions that will in all likelihood allow for unrestricted worker exploitation and maximum profitability. Silver (2003) captures this correctly by noting that due to globalization, capital under the guise of international investment, moves to new sites where labour is weak or non-existent but worker resistance ultimately emerges even in those new sites.

A historical account of the textile industry shows that labour's workplace bargaining power is not as great as it was in the auto industry (Silver, 2003). This then forced the workers to resort to what she terms 'associational power', which basically forces them to seek alliances with other working class sectors. The above scenario suggests that the isolation of textile workers and their attempt to seek struggle allies should serve as a catalyst for class formations and struggles for national liberation.

These alliances should further be boosted by the involvement of those workers that have been left out due to boundary drawing as argued by Silver (2003). Capitalism, argues Silver, has got a tendency of bringing workers' together in competition with each other through the fixes as discussed earlier. However, the workers' instinctive response to this can also serve as catalyst for bigger struggles.

Silver observes that in the past there was a tendency of the struggles of textile workers to converge with nationalist struggles in the colonial world because the middle class nationalist leaders required a mass base, while the textile workers needed allies (Silver, 2003). In the context of Swaziland, this argument gives an impression that the rapid growth of the textile industry, and by implication, the proletarianization of the Swazi society should provide for a strategic alliance in the national liberation struggle. This alliance should by implication be a catalyst for the making of a working class movement, a view also shared by Munck (2004).

Burawoy (2003) in analysing the contours of production also sees the connection between labour and politics as the heart of a Marxist tradition which should be a catalyst for revolutionary struggles against the state. However, Poulantzas as cited in Burawoy (2003) argues that the state is no longer simply an object of struggles but instead becomes an arena for struggles between and within apparatuses.

This argument gives a picture of the state as a contested entity between various classes and institutions. He further argues that the reproduction of relations of production requires the domination of capital over labour and this is made possible by the powerlessness of workers dependent upon capital for their survival (Burawoy, 2003). One could however, argue differently in that it is the same dependency that makes workers rise against capital and creates the Polanyian counter-hegemonic movement.

Even Karl Marx gave shape to the idea of 'the making' of a working class by arguing that whilst the objective of worker struggles outside the point of production is to reshape the

relations of production, their object is the state that give them their distinct form (Burawoy, 2003). Because of this, he argues that there is a paradox whereby the factory is regarded as the crucible of class consciousness and resistance whilst it is also presented as some kind of an arena for undisputed domination, fragmentation, degradation and mystification (Burawoy, 2003). However, he concludes by emphasizing the impact of the forces of production on the political struggle and how production politics affect the development of the struggle both within and outside the workplace.

The making, unmaking and remaking of the working class as articulated by Munck (2004) tends to converge with Polanyi's analysis of the embedding, dis-embedding and re-embedding of the economy to (and from) society. Polanyi argues that in the early years of capitalism, the economy was embedded in society and then there was an attempt to dis-embed it through the use of market forces, a scenario he likens to a 'pendulum swing'.

Furthermore, attempts were made to re-embed it to society through a counter-hegemonic movement, which was effectively the re-making of the working class and of the labour movement. It can therefore be argued that the free markets' assault by capital (Polanyi's great transformation) was crucial in the unmaking of the working class. In this regard, Polanyi also argues that the suffrage that was brought about by the advent of democracy enabled the working class to mobilise for a leverage that will accord them power against the proponents of free markets.

Furthermore, labour market flexibility is quite crucial in this work because of the vulnerability, uncertainty and instability of the textile industry. A basic understanding of labour market flexibility is provided by Kenny (2001) and links it to the ability of companies to adapt the use of labour to changes in other markets. The militancy of the working class, it can be argued, is hindered by the casualization of workers which can be understood in terms of functional, numerical, work time and wage flexibility. Therefore, contrary to a docile labour as envisaged by migrating capital, a spatial fix also needs various forms of labour market flexibility to contain the re-making of a working class. It

is on this basis that the introduction of Africa Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) can be seen as characterized by various forms of labour flexibility that has an impact on the formation of a countermovement.

Following on from these theoretical tools that may assist us in understanding the potential impact of the growth of textile employment on politics in contemporary Swaziland, the rest of this chapter (i) provides background on Swaziland as a country, (ii) explores how notions of tradition were mobilized in Swazi politics, (iii) and describes and explains the role of industrial unrest and the working class in Swazi politics.

1.3 Swaziland – the country

Swaziland is a landlocked country that shares approximately 75% of its border with South Africa and the north-eastern part with Mozambique, and has a population of approximately 1 million people in a 17,364 sq km area, which is mainly rural. Two main towns, Mbabane and Manzini carry a majority of the urban population, 60,000 and 80,000 respectively (Economist Intelligence, 2003). There are other industrial towns such as Mhlume, Simunye and Big-Bend lie on the sugar belt and Bhunya which has a pulp mill and is a historical site of struggle for plantation workers.

A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study in 2000 shows that Swaziland has a high income inequality than most developed countries and this can be explained by the monopolization of the means of accumulation by an assortment of forces contesting for the country's wealth. It is argued by some scholars that Swaziland is characterised by a plethora of power centres, institutions, organizations and individuals, all of which are involved in a perpetual struggle for control and hegemony over key sectors, policy decisions and programmes of the Swazi economy.

However, it can be argued that there are two major causes of the persistent economic inequality, the first being the Tinkhundla regime's tendency to monopolize national resources and allocating them to loyalists thereby excluding the majority of Swazis.

Secondly, the 'growth' of the economy has not translated into development and benefit for the majority of the people of Swaziland, hence the idea of a jobless growth, as reflected by the UNDP report of 2000 and the Central Bank of Swaziland (CBS) report of 2002.

The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the economy of the country is currently going through a structural crisis, resulting in the 'lack of growth' which is itself indicated by the fact that the economic growth dropped to 1.5% in 2002 compared to 2.5% for 2000 and 3.7% for 1999 (CBS, Annual Report, 2002). Furthermore, the situation is compounded by the lack of foreign direct investments as a result of the socio-economic crisis engulfing the country, thereby reflecting an economic vicious cycle.

The UNDP report of 2000 provides some key features of the Swazi economy, including the high levels of poverty that affects mainly the rural population, which is 70% of the total population. It also shows that the economy is still agri-based, whilst most of the land still remains in the hands of a few including the king, who supposedly holds it 'in trust' of the Swazi people. The report also shows that the bulk of the wealth in Swaziland is concentrated in the hands of a minority. Furthermore, the economy is largely dependent on the South African economy in particular, with whom it shares $\frac{3}{4}$ of the border and Southern Africa in general from which 50% of the budget is obtained through the Southern African Customs Union (SACU).

The 1999 gross national product (GNP) per capita of \$1360 classifies Swaziland as a middle income country, regardless of the huge inequalities that can be seen in the country. This approach makes a false assumption that, the size of the Swazi economy in relation to the size of the population, automatically means that everybody is guaranteed access to all basic resources, which in reality is not the case. For example, existing statistics show that "only about 5% of the population control more than 80% of the Swazi economy", which means that 95% of the population share a mere 20% of the economy (Economist Intelligence, 2003).

In essence, there is no automatic link between human development and income growth, as can be seen through huge inequalities based on the unequal distribution of income and living conditions. It can also be seen through the unequal access to basic needs such as education and employment, massive rural and urban poverty and landlessness.

The above argument also seeks to dispel the thinking that a middle income country automatically translates to a bigger middle class within a country. Levin (1997) traces the class structure of Swaziland to 1938 whereby there were only six shops registered in the names of Swazis and this had a lot to do with obtaining permission from chiefs. With agriculture being the most dominant sector, the 58% figure of non-wage earners in 1956 could be understood in terms of “petty commodity producing peasants” (Levin, 1997; 59). Furthermore, it was only around this time that an educated Swazi elite emerged which was to later form part of the emerging middle class.

It can still be argued that with a 70% rural population, a semi-feudal society that still practice various forms of tribute labour and a manufacturing sector that contributes only 29% to the economy, (Economist Intelligence, 2003) the Swazi society is still peasantry based. However, this class cannot be seen as purely peasant (as in Marxist terms), because it is also dependent on some form of wage/earnings from a family member. In essence, the Swazi class structure is largely semi-peasant, but also includes a significant proletariat, a limited middle class and an even lesser industrial and agrarian bourgeoisie.

In terms of regions, the Manzini region (which includes the Matsapha Industrial Site) has the highest human development index, while Shiselweni has the lowest due to its high rate of unemployment. This is also a reflection of the patterns of development in Swaziland which are urban-biased while the majority of the people (70%) live in rural areas, under conditions of total neglect. On the other hand, Lubombo region has the highest life expectancy index, followed by Manzini and Hhohho regions, while Shiselweni again has the lowest (Economist Intelligence, 2003).

The response of the tinkhundla regime to the prevailing economic crisis has been ambiguous yet predictable. The regime has taken the neo-liberal road to restructuring as a solution to the socio-economic crisis facing Swaziland. Whilst in Zimbabwe, Mugabe called his economic restructuring exercise the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's), Mswati has opted to call his the Internal Structural Adjustment Programme (ISAP). Just like other forms of structural adjustments programmes driven by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), this programme is based on the logic of transforming everything into a commodity and putting people's lives under the dictates of the market at all levels of social life.

The ISAP programme includes privatizing much of the public sector, deregulating the whole economy, de-subsidizing basic goods, cutting social expenditure on basic needs, wages and infrastructure development (PSI, 2002). On the other hand, the state has played an important role in creating new conditions for the maximisation of profitability and private accumulation by supporters and loyalists of the system through the strengthening of its repressive capacity which includes the army, the police, the judiciary and its intelligence forces.

Another key aspect of the government's agenda has been to restructure the economy in such a way that the redistribution of the country's wealth has been made difficult. The launch of the very same Internal Structural Adjustments Programme (ISAP) in the fiscal year 1995/96, which expressed itself in the form of the Public Sector Management Programme (PSMP) and its implementation plan, the Economic and Social Reform Agenda (ESRA) were an attempt by the regime to develop a response to its internal crisis, particularly in view of the intensified labour struggle which was at its height. Subsequent programmes such as the Fiscal Restructuring Programme (FRP), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Millennium Action Plan (MAP) were also introduced.

Regardless of all these restructuring programmes, the Central Bank of Swaziland report indicates that the country's current economic slowdown is exceptionally deep and broad,

with no evidence that the downward spiral that began two years ago will see a recovery (CBS, 2002). Almost all of these programmes impact directly on the people in general, including the working class, rural masses, women, children and youth. This is also compounded by the non-existence of the expected foreign investment except for an influx of export-based Asian textile firms that are capitalizing on the opportunities afforded to sub-Saharan countries through AGOA.

To this far, it can be argued that the Swazi economy is firmly in the hands of the state and this has been achieved through the purchase of shares in the entire major companies and its active involvement in bringing investors into the country. Past studies have revealed that government does have a role in terms of wooing international investors and statistics already indicate that it has substantial shares in other sectors. For example, it has 100% shares in Tibiyo Properties (Pty) Ltd, Swazi Observer, Swazi Printing, Dalcrue Agricultural Holdings and 40% in Swaziland Beverages and other companies. In essence, Tibiyo hold shares in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, transport and tourism, and the commerce, finance, services and property sector. Interestingly the Swazi working class struggles (as shall be explained below) have been waged across all sectors including those where the royal family have interests through Tibiyo TakaNgwane.

1.4 ‘Tradition’ and politics in Swaziland

After years of British rule, Swaziland gained independence in 1968, whereupon five years later king Sobhuza II banned political parties. Currently, it resembles what the Economist Intelligence (2003) terms a traditional dual monarchy, where the king and his mother (Queen mother) rule together and their rule is characterized by a 33 year old state of emergency that was passed through the 1973 royal decree³ banning political parties.

The reasons for the banning of political parties was the fact that the opposition was gaining in strength in terms of parliamentary seats and becoming a threat to the king’s

³ A decree that was passed by King Sobhuza II, effectively repealing the 1968 constitution on the pretext that it was entrenching (foreign) western ideas. This resulted in the banning of political parties, political meetings and any form of political activity.

own political party, a threat that was further dealt with, through the formal introduction of the tinkhundla system in 1978 (Levin,1997). However, this ban theoretically excluded labour organizations (trade unions) although in practice the state security agents interfered with their meetings. Although at the beginning the labour movement mobilized around broader issues, continuous surveillance and interference from security agents forced it to focus on shop floor issues.

In an attempt at instituting piecemeal reforms due to pressure exerted by progressive democratic formations that included political organizations, organized labour and civil society, the king established various consultative commissions known as '*vuselas*'⁴. In line with the need to entrench royal hegemony, all the consultative commissions were chaired by royal family members and the commissioners themselves were chiefs, loyalists or members of the Swazi National Council⁵ (SNC), an advisory body to the king.

The three *vusela* commissions culminated in the 1996 Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) into which the king once again appointed a variety of conservatives and loyalists who were mainly princes and chiefs. The imposition of these commissioners was yet another undemocratic process, although a few so-called 'progressives' were also appointed, of which some refused. A final report was released in 2001 and not surprisingly it "reflected the influence of conservatives who favour maintaining the current political system" (Economist Intelligence, 2003; 68). It has been argued though, that the CRC was not a direct result of the royal *vuselas*, but was a result of pressure exerted by the democratic formations.

The above also indicates the existing tension between the traditionalists who are custodians of the tinkhundla system and the modernists who are proponents for political

⁴ Consultative commissions established by the king to establish the views of Swazi people. All three of them were headed by the king's brothers.

⁵ An advisory body to the king and is dominated royal family members and chiefs and conservative traditionalists

reforms. Masuku (2002) argues that the key players in Swazi politics include the modern government, represented by the civil service and public enterprises, Parliament, the King and the traditional aristocracy represented by the SNC, the faceless “labadzala⁶”, Tibiyo TakaNgwane and Tisuka TakaNgwane. The tinkhundla superstructure is designed such that the king is not only a patron of these royal parastatals but is also at the top and both the head of civil government and the head of the traditional government (royal governor) prime minister report to him. This dualism shows a regime in an identity crisis and desperately trying to fuse feudalist tendencies into modern systems of governance.

The ‘traditional’ prime minister is head of and responsible for the chiefs, tindvuna temmango⁷, bandlancane⁸ and bagijimi⁹ which are all patriarchal traditional figures. On the other hand the ‘civil’ prime minister oversees the modern structure of parliament which is made up of the house of assembly and senate. The house of assembly is made up of 65 members, of which 55 are elected at an inkhundla¹⁰ (which falls under the jurisdiction of a chief) and the other 10 is appointed by the king. The senate is made up of 30 members, of which 10 are elected by the house of assembly and 20 is appointed by the king (Human Rights Commission, 2003). See figure 1 in the next page for a complete tinkhundla structure.

⁶ Elders of the nation only known to the traditional aristocracy. They have never been publicly revealed.

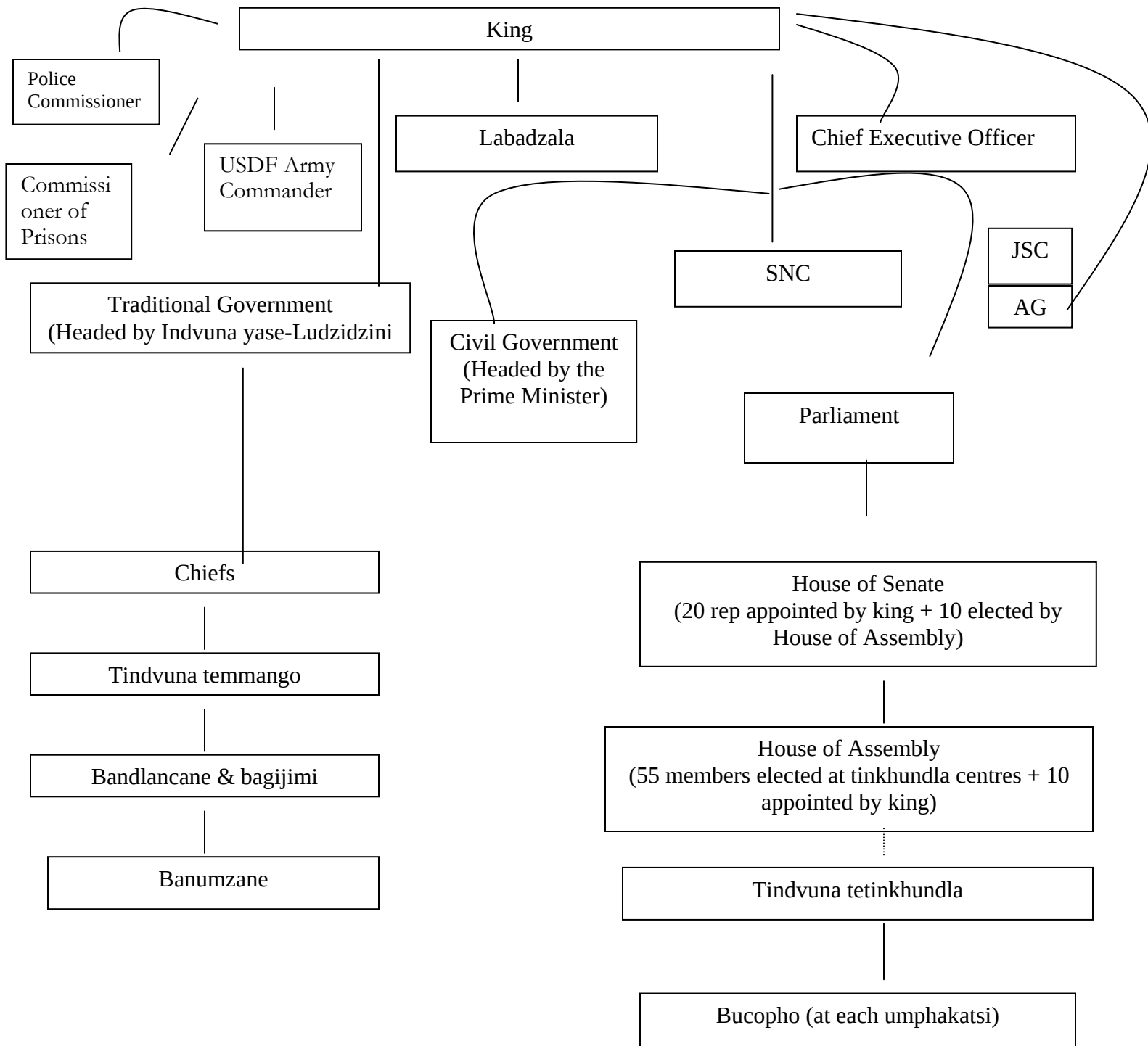
⁷ Constituency headman

⁸ Inner Council based in a constituency

⁹ Chief’s runner

¹⁰ Constituency

**Figure 1:
The Tinkhundla Superstructure**



Each of the above tinkhundla components has a significant role that it plays starting right at the top whereby the king in whose person, all powers are vested, is to be found. The king has the power to issue decrees, as was the case with the 1973 king's decree, to give or refuse consent to any bill from parliament. He also appoints his advisers to the Swazi National Council (SNC), the Attorney General (AG), the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), the civil Prime Minister and the traditional prime minister, the chief electoral officer, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, regional administrators, and principal secretaries.

Furthermore, he is the commander in chief of the Umtsofo Swaziland Defence Force (USDF) and personally appoints the commissioner of police, commissioner of correctional services and the commander of the army. He also assumes the position of Ingwenyama (umlomo longacali-manga), which literally suggest that he may never say or do wrong and is also the Chancellor of the University of Swaziland. In fact he is in full control of all land in the country 'in trust of the Swazi nation', and all legislative, judicial and executive powers are vested in him.

There is a mysterious advisory body aptly named 'labadzala' which is made up of senior princes, princesses and senior traditionalists. This structure is not known to the public, and its composition is always assumed. However, they are a very influential group that is involved in all decision making in the country and interact directly with the monarchy. Lately it has served as a ticket to impunity whereby senior figures who find themselves on the wrong side of the laws of the land, can always point towards 'labadzala' as cover. A more recent example is that of a Swaziland Television and Broadcasting Corporation (STBC) employee who was sacked but refused to comply, arguing that nobody can fire him except 'labadzala' who are his employers.

The Swazi National Council (SNC) is another advisory body consisting of 30 members appointed by the king. Unlike 'labadzala', this body is more visible as its members are openly appointed, usually after the appointment of a new prime minister. But like labadzala, it also advises the king on traditional and other matters that relate to governance. A majority of them are well known traditionalists very close to the king, i.e.

princes, princesses and chiefs, with a few conservative intellectuals and other ordinary people to give it a public image. The SNC scrutinize the bills intended for parliamentary debate and further scrutinize them after debate in parliament before being signed into law by the king. This body is also directly accountable to the king, and has often been accused of ensuring that the king hears and signs only what he wants to hear and sign into law, and not what the people want.

In line with the dichotomous political structure of traditional and modern institutions as alluded to by Levin, the traditional Prime Minister, often referred to as Indvuna yase-Ludzidzini, also plays a significant role from his traditional headquarters. His main task is to ensure that chiefs in the various chiefdoms keep control of their subjects and also that the self same chiefs are under control. Furthermore, he ensures that 'subjects' attend to royal duties like umhlanga, lusekwane, incwala, kuhlakula, kuvuna, buganu, immemo and the king's birthday celebrations. This traditional prime minister, who is always a male, also liaise with the so-called 'labadzala' and the council of chiefs, and is often seen as an expert on what is supposed to be Swazi culture.

The chief in liaison with his indvuna ensures that his subjects attend royal duties as outlined above; otherwise fines are imposed on those who defy him. In essence, he is an eye for the king in the locality and as a result, he has the powers to control the distribution of land on behalf of the king. This he does through kukhontisa, from which he gets direct benefits either monetary or materially. He may demand that the subject provides tribute labour through performing duties in his field or paying some dues to him.

Chiefs are to be found both in rural and urban areas and are appointed by the king if and when he pleases. In recent years, this tendency by the king has led to a number of chieftaincy disputes in communities and even other chiefs rebelling against the appointing authorities. Some of those who rebelled such as in Macetjeni and KaMkhweli won a court order against their eviction which was ignored by the king and they were required to apologize to the perpetrator. The bone of contention has always been that the position of a chief should be inherited instead of being at the discretion of the king. Most

chiefs belong to the council of chiefs, which is yet another traditional structure that is accountable to the authorities at Ludzidzini.

As mentioned earlier, there are 55 tinkhundla centres in all and each inkhundla has got its indvuna, often elected simultaneously with the local Member of Parliament or just after the parliamentary elections. Each indvuna yenkhundla together with the local Bucopho organize the people into structures such as community organizations. Furthermore, he ensures that every member of the community is kept busy with a project like water schemes and poultry projects instead of participating in political issues of the country. In essence, he acts as an eye for the chiefs with whom he works very closely, in the process ensuring that any subject, who is seen to be participating in politics, is dealt with accordingly, sometimes even through eviction.

Indvuna ye-mmango (lesser than indvuna yenkhundla), umgijimi and bandlancane are all components of chiefdoms and their duty is to convey the chief's messages to the community and ensure that orders are adhered to. They are certainly not democratic structures and usually haul defiant subjects in the community to kangaroo courts for trial. A threat of eviction and a fine of a cow for a guilty verdict are quite common.

With Swaziland being a classic case of a patriarchal society, umnumzane welikhaya is the lowest yet important strata of the tinkhundla structure. He is part of 'bandlakhulu' in the umphakatsi. Furthermore, he is a member of the king's regiments that performs royal duties. At the local level, he ensures that his family is well schooled on the role of each member in the community. The indvuna and bandlancane as discussed above, link with him directly, and then ensures that his family participates in any activity organized by the chief. Directly or indirectly, he plays a big role in entrenching patriarchy, and he also benefits through payment of dowry for a girl-child, hence he may at times practice kwendzisa just for his own benefit. As much as the king has been abducting young girls for his brides in the name of culture, parents have also played a role as collaborators.

On the other hand, the modern form of government is headed by the prime minister who is always a Dlamini and is appointed by the king. Ideally, he is head of cabinet and parliament which is made up of elected and appointed parliamentarians. Parliamentarians in both houses, i.e. senate and assembly, are supposed to be lawmakers, but in reality they are subordinated to the Swazi National Council which deals with legislations before and after they have been to parliament. The duty of parliament is widely seen as that of rubberstamping decisions of 'labadzala' and the SNC, and many times the king has bypassed or refused to sign bills that he or labadzala did not agree with. The role of traditional government within the operations of civil government can therefore not be underplayed, even though they are distinct structures, hence it becomes clear that parliament only pass legislation that is acceptable to the king.

The two houses as referred to earlier include the house of Assembly which has 55 members elected at tinkhundla centres and 10 additional members appointed by the king. They debate bills from the cabinet, after which they pass them to senate for further discussion. However, the duty of the 10 appointees of the king in parliament is to make sure that anything not acceptable to the appointing hand is not passed on to senate. If somehow an 'undesirable' bill is passed on to senate, then senate can still contain and reject it as it (senate) is made 66% king's appointees. The tinkhundla structure is designed such that those who are elected or appointed into parliament are not politically conscious, because part of the duties of an indvuna at the local level is to ensure that subjects do not partake in politics.

The Senate house is smaller than the house of assembly and is composed of two thirds king's appointees. Its specific duty is to deliberate on bills that have been passed to it by the house of assembly and then pass the bills to the Swazi National Council. The two thirds majority required for them pass a bill becomes a mere formality due to the composition of the house. In a way, it could be argued that its other unstated task is to ensure that whatever may have slipped through the attention (and strength) of the 10 appointees in the lower house does not pass through the upper house. It should also be mentioned that up to so far, the bills that have passed through them are not laws yet.

The confusion between a traditional and a modern system of governance, of holding elections within the confines of tinkhundla and the desire to control the whole process has meant that the king also appoint a Chief Electoral Officer. In a small country like Swaziland, the chief electoral officer happens to be an uncle to the king (a blood brother of the king's mother) and holds a lifetime position. Like the rest of the appointees, he is appointed by the king and is only answerable to him and his stated duties are to facilitate the election process in the country. In practical terms this duty entails ensuring the tinkhundla election system sift all the unwanted political elements from the whole process, but also accepts others to gain legitimacy and acceptance. Through liaising with chiefs he also ensures that people participate in the election process at their respective tinkhundla centres.

Within the same tinkhundla structure is a six member Judicial Service Commission (JSC) that is directly appointed by the king. It is mainly responsible for recommending people that can be appointed as judges by the king. However, the appointment of the judges of the high court and the court of appeal and their sacking remains the sole responsibility of the king. This is given effect by the fact that when Sobhuza repealed the 1973 constitution, he assumed all powers including judicial powers. The Attorney General is not necessarily part of the JSC but is also appointed directly by the king and advises him (the king), parliament, and government on all legal matters. He also sits in parliament as an ex-officio member and is responsible for ensuring that all bills that are in conflict with the liking of the king are not passed as laws of the country.

Lastly, the security forces, aptly named the Royal Swaziland Police, Umbutfo Swaziland Defence Force and His Majesty's Correctional Services are widely seen as instruments of enforcing royal decrees. In the event that traditional structures are unable to deal with dissent, these forces remain ready to violently pounce on any voice of dissent.

Recruitment for the army in particular takes place at the various tinkhundla centres and at the royal villages (etihoncwini). Whether by choice or otherwise, officers from these armed forces form a large part of the regiments that plough, weeds and harvest the king's fields. The Army Commander, Police Commissioner, Prisons' Commissioner all form

part of the 'Thursday Committee' which is yet another structure that regularly meet with the king at the royal palace.

Only recently, another committee that will advise the king strictly on economic matters has been established. Therefore, a clear understanding of the tinkhundla structure and the role played by each component is necessary for understanding the source of working class oppression in Swaziland. To this far it can be argued that the source of worker oppression and exploitation in Swaziland is therefore, an organized tinkhundla system that is organized by and run in the interest of the royal family and the capitalist bosses who own and control the country's economy. A royal parastatal in the form of Tibiyo TakaNgwane is a convergence point for both business and tinkhundla loyalists.

Both parties as mentioned above benefit by shutting the Swazi workers and ordinary citizens out of political and economic power. This is done through a system whereby the tinkhundla regime controls the political system and uses it to protect the interests of a rich minority against a poor majority. On the other hand, capitalist bosses control the economy and in turn share the proceeds with the royal family and close associates, as can be seen again through the Tibiyo TakaNgwane investments.

The above socio-political and economic situation has its roots from the early colonial expansion which in Swaziland thrived on a society organized along hierarchical lines in which the king and chiefs extracted tribute labour from their *subjects*¹¹ (Levin; 1997). Therefore colonialism and capitalism in Swaziland created a peasantry that was increasingly integrated into the circuits of capital through agricultural petty commodity production (Levin, 1997) but that never really lost its peasantry inclinations.

The royal aristocracy, through the Swazi National Council (SNC) also played a role in propagating the interests of the colonial masters, as can be seen through their attitude towards workers. Amongst other things, the aristocracy created a so-called '*ndvuna*'¹²

¹¹ Swazis are normally referred to as the king's subjects rather than citizens

¹² Worker representative appointed to be an 'eye and ear' of the royal family in the workplace

system, a worker representation system that was designed to frustrate workers, by allowing the traditional aristocracy to appoint an *indvuna* (worker representative) who was almost always anti-worker (Levin, 1997). In order to understand these attempts to control workers and their organisations, we have to consider the historical role played by the labour movement in Swazi politics, and how the monarchy construed this role as a threat to 'Swazi culture'.

1.5 The labour movement and politics

The tinkhundla regime has over the years been able to use the divide and rule strategy to maximum effect, thus dividing the working class along a category of the employed and the unemployed. Dating back to the early 1970's the regime banned political organizations through the 1973 royal decree on the one hand, but left trade unions to operate on the other. Regardless of pressure from the International Labour Organization (ILO) to allow for free trade union activity, the royal regime still sought to contain and define the trade union agenda. In particular, it has sought to define for the trade unions what issues are labour related and what is political. However, Swazi workers both inside and outside the trade union movement have demonstrated their ability to engage in both bread and butter issues, and issues that impact on them outside the workplace. This history of militant worker struggles can be traced way back from the 1960's and is important in characterizing the current state of the labour movement.

1.5.1 Industrial unrest (1960-1988)

In 1960, a report (by FC Catchpole) on labour legislation was released and it suggested that amendments be made to the Trade Union and Trade Disputes Proclamation no.31 of 1942 and this bordered on the imposition of the 'ndvuna' system (Masuku, 2002). The subsequent Works Council system that followed was an improved version of the 'ndvuna' system as it excluded workers and did not provide for maximum participation by the workers. These instances forced the workers to realize the importance of trade unions as proven by the first trade union strike in Swaziland organized by the Pulp and

Timber Workers Union (PTWU) in 1962 and the formation of the Swaziland Mining Workers Union (SMWU) at Havelock Asbestos Mine (Levin, 1997).

The first strike of 1963 was waged by railway line workers demanding better wages and complaining about the uselessness of the *indvuna* that was supposed to represent them (Masuku, 2002). In March of the same year, 2500 Ubombo Ranches Sugar Plantation workers in Big-Bend went on strike, an action that led to a confrontation with the police. The state responded by passing a legislation that forbade strikes and lockouts without a three week prior notice and also legislated other measures to increase the power of police (in dealing with strikers). Regardless of these measures, the wave of labour unrest continued at Peak Timber Mill when 150 sawmill workers demanded a pay increase and this was followed by another strike in the same company two months later, a strike that was in support of other retrenched workers (Masuku, 2002).

Another major strike also took place in 1963 at the British owned Havelock Asbestos Mine and was supported by about 1350 workers. It dragged on ‘peacefully’ for two and a half months until the police fired teargas to a crowd and arrested 12 so-called ringleaders and this led to a general strike in Mbabane. The strike went on regardless of pleas from an SNC member who was allegedly sent by the king to urge striking workers to go back to work in the interest of investors (Masuku, 2002).

The mineworkers struggle was further boosted by the solidarity they got from the plantation workers in Piggs Peak and Ubombo Ranches and the cotton pickers who all downed tools. The government responded by declaring a state of emergency and backed it up through police reinforcements from Botswana and “an entire battalion from the Gordon Highlanders¹³ was airlifted from Kenya” (Masuku, 2002). This marked a setback for the working class and labour movement but it signalled a serious challenge to the state in as far as its hegemony was concerned.

¹³ A paramilitary force imported from Kenya to deal with the wave of strikes.

Of importance here is the dialectical nature of this incident of the Gordon Highlanders, because whilst it posed a serious threat to the state, in general, and the royal elite in particular, it also posed serious challenges to the labour movement in the country. These challenges reflected themselves in the political lull that eventually followed in the period between the late 1960's and the early 1980's. There are various speculations that different people make around this political lull. Some argue that it was mainly due to the 'intervention' of this Kenyan force which created fear amongst the workers, whilst others argue that it was basically a political reflection of the level of the struggle in the country.

1.5.2 The re-mergence of labour struggles (1989-2000)

However, towards the 1990's the labour movement re-emerged when the Swaziland Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers (SUFIAW) led by Mario Masuku¹⁴ threatened to go on strike in demand of a 15% increase in 1989, to which the state responded by throwing him and others into jail. Due to a threat by bank workers to march onto the royal palace, he was released after only four days. In May the same year the Industrial Court president ordered the Construction Associates Company to recognize the Building and Construction Workers Union (BCWU) and in June railway workers also threatened to strike to force management to recognize the Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers Union (STAWU). This ultimately led to a strike at the end of August for the same demand.

Then in July 1989, workers at the Swaziland Breweries went on strike for two days demanding the reinstatement of a fellow worker whilst in August (1989), 500 seasonal workers were fired in Tambuti estates for striking for overtime allowances. Interestingly, the king responded to this unrest by summoning the nation to the national kraal whereby he fired the Prime Minister and replaced him with a former trade unionist (Obed Dlamini¹⁵) who was employed as a personnel manager by that time.

¹⁴ Former bank employee and current PUDEMO president.

¹⁵ Former Prime minister. Also a member of the royal family and leader of the illegal Ngwane National Liberation Congress (NNLC).

It is in these royal kraal sessions that the king seeks to reinforce divisive ideas such as the one that “trade unionism is a foreign ideology to the Swazi. All workers are in this kingdom are His Majesty’s regiments...” (Levin, 1997). This approach can also be understood in terms of Nichols and Cam’s (2004) discussion of labour control whereby they make examples of Asian factory workers. Whilst in these countries the workers are made to identify with their factory, in Swaziland workers are urged not only to identify with the factory, but also with the king, who supposedly brought the factories in the first place.

The leading force in terms of workers’ struggles in the past three decades has been the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) which was formed in 1971 and immediately faced a major crackdown from the regime. Although there was a lull in trade union activity in the 1980’s, the SFTU emerged as a stronger force in the 1990’s as shown by the nine-day strike it waged at the beginning of 1996 and two more mass actions in the same year, that finally forced the state to recognize May day. The 1990’s also saw the emergence of the SFTU “27 demands”, which was basically an assortment of political and labour oriented demands. According to Salmond (1997), the SFTU’s two day strikes led to the formation of a tripartite forum that included government, labour and employers in an effort to resolve the 27 demands.

The SFTU however, developed its own internal problems including unaccountability and “failure to service unions and effectively challenge government” (Levin, 1997). These problems led to attempts at forming the Swaziland Congress of Trade Unions (SWACOTU) as an alternative federation, an initiative that was led by the Peoples United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) activists. This initiative failed to take off due to opposition from all sides, and most importantly due to tensions between PUDEMO and the SFTU which saw the initiative as a COSATU interference. Secondly the labour commissioner declared the federation to be “too political”, hence could not be registered as required by law (PUDEMO Conference Report, 2003).

Furthermore, the state also did not see the federation as a genuine trade union initiative and was bold enough to even use seized documents as evidence in the PUDEMO treason trial¹⁶ which was a political issue. Later the Swaziland Federation of Labour (SFL) was formed by some 'dissident' members of the SFTU. Though the concerns that marked the break-away of the SFL were genuine, they however turned out to be workerist and administrative than populist and ideologically based, hence can be seen as reactionary and apologetic to the regime. Instead of pursuing a revolutionary working class theory within the federation the SFL tried to confine the role of a trade union within the parameters of the discredited tinkhundla system that is hostile to workers.

Key economic sectors, includes agriculture and manufacturing which also explains the trade union numerical distribution with regards to federation affiliation. The SFTU still remains the biggest federation than the SFL with more affiliates although it has recently been decimated by retrenchments and the indefinite suspension of its biggest affiliates; specifically the nurses association (SNA), the transport workers union (STAWU) and the civil servants union (SNACS).

On the other hand, the SFL, its breakaway consists mainly of financial institutions workers with its main affiliate being the Swaziland Union of Financial and Allied Workers (SUFIAW), but it also organizes in all sectors. The teachers' union, the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) is another profession based union and has resisted all attempts to be affiliated to the SFTU, although of late there has been an increasing collaboration on various issues. The Swaziland Amalgamated Trade Unions (SATU) was also formed recently as an alternative to the two federations and also because of undesirable tendencies within the SFTU, but attempts to elevate it to a federation status has so far failed. Figure, provides a rough reflection of trade union distribution and membership in Swaziland. Although it covers the period up to 2004, it

¹⁶ The state seized documents related to SWACOTU and used them as evidence in a case where leading members of PUDEMO were charged with attempting to overthrow the state.

reflects a relatively low level of unionization, considering that there were approximately 95 000 workers in Swaziland by 2004.

Various labour legislations have been passed by the regime over time, and it can be argued that more often than not they tend to work against the very same workers they are meant for. For example, the Employment Act (1980) aims to improve the status of employees through written contracts of employment but excludes domestic workers and workers in the agriculture sector although it covers workers in public authority (PSI Report, 2002). Public authority workers include the central government, local authority and the Ngwenyama¹⁷ (king) in Council. Furthermore, the Workmen's Compensation Act (1983) allows for workers to claim compensation in cases of work related injuries or diseases, but it excludes members of the defence force.

The chronology of labour activity over the past five decades also illustrates the key role that trade unions have played in the political history of Swaziland. For example the construction workers strike of 1963 sought to get rid of an indvuna who was a representative of the traditional aristocracy in the workplace; hence they indirectly challenged the traditional aristocracy. The subsequent legislations pertaining to strikes and lockouts and 'increased police power' also show that the state treated the threat posed by labour as serious and dangerous to the political setup.

Furthermore, the labour struggles waged by SUFIAW and the SFTU have brought to the fore political leaders such as Mario Masuku and Obed Dlamini. This can also be seen through the use of the confiscated SWACOTU documents in the PUDEMO treason trial and the fact that the very same independence of 1968 was as a result of the consistent workers struggles, a point that most historians miss. The question now arises as to what is the potential impact of the increase in employment in the textiles industry might be. Could this reconstitution of the working class lead to a countermovement and what could be the limitations to this countermovement?

¹⁷ Traditional reference to the king, literally meaning 'the lion'.

Figure 2:
Unions and membership in Swaziland, 1999 and 2004

Organization	Membership (1999)	Membership (2004)
Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU)	83 000	29 341 (-65%)
Swaziland Media Publishers and Allied Workers Union (SMEPAWU)	350	350
Workers Union of Swaziland Town Councils (WUSTC)	200	446
Swaziland Water Services and Allied Workers Union (SWASAWU)	-	300
Swaziland Security Guards and Allied Workers Union (SSGAWU)	-	-
Swaziland Mining, Quarrying and Allied Workers Union (SMQAWU)	-	-
Swaziland Agricultural, Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SAPAWU)	-	17 000
Swaziland Engineering, Metal, Automobile and Allied Workers Union (SEMAAWU)	-	3500
Swaziland Electricity Supply, Maintenance and Allied Workers Union (SESMAWU)	653	550
Association of Lecturers and Academic Personnel of the University of Swaziland (ALAP)	80	80
Swaziland Hotel and Catering Allied Workers Union (SHCAWU)	1500	360
Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers Union (STAWU)	-	497
Swaziland National Association of Civil Servants (SNACS)	-	3330
Swaziland Post and Telecommunication Services Workers Union (SPTSWU)	600	500
Swaziland Nurses Association (SNA)	-	1117
Swaziland Union of Non-Academic Staff for Higher Institutions (SUNASHI)	-	-
Swaziland Manufacturing and Processing Industry Staff Association (SMAPISA)	50	111
Swaziland Printing Refinery and Allied Workers Union (SPRAWU)	-	1200
Swaziland Federation of Labour (SFL)	11 656	9552 (-18%)
Swaziland Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers (SUFIAW)	1156	1200
Swaziland Commercial and Allied Workers Union (SCAWU)	1500	777
Swaziland Manufacturing and Allied Workers Union (SMAWU)	9000	7000
Swaziland Pre-school and Allied Workers Union (SWAPRESAWU)	-	300
Insurance Allied Undertakings Workers Union (IAUWU)	-	70
Swaziland Pulp and Paper Manufacturing Workers and Allied Workers Union (SWAPMAWU)	-	130
Swaziland National Learning Institutions and Allied Workers Union (SNALIAW)	-	75
Non-Affiliated Organizations	9048	8755 (-3%)
National Electricity Supply Maintenance and Allied Staff Association (NESMASA)	-	-
Swaziland Staff Association for Financial Institutions (SSAAFI)	-	-
Swaziland Post and Telecoms Co-operation Staff Association (SPTCSA)	48	104
Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT)	9000	8361
Swaziland City Council Staff Association (SCCSA)	-	44
Swaziland Water Services Staff Association (SWSSA)	-	35
Swaziland Agricultural Manufacturing and Allied Staff Association (SAMASA)	-	100

Adapted from: Annual Report (2005), Department of Labour, Kingdom of Swaziland

1.6 Methodology

In order to understand whether the growth of jobs in the textiles industry leads to the emergence of a countermovement in Swaziland, this study primarily draws on a case study of TEXREY, a textiles firm located in the Matsapha industrial area just outside Manzini. An attempt is made to use this case as a ‘prism’ in order to explore broader social processes. Interviews and observation were used as the key methods to collect data.

Twenty eight interviews were conducted with seventeen (shop-floor) workers. A total of eleven were interviewed on two occasions. The first cohort of seventeen workers was interviewed in December 2005 and January 2006. In November 2006 another cohort of workers was interviewed, and care was taken to include as many of the workers who were previously interviewed, as possible. Eleven of the original seventeen were included. One of these workers had left her job when she was interviewed for the second time.

During the first cohort of interviews, questions were asked about the nature of employment and households. During the second cohort of interviews, questions focussed on patterns of resistance. In addition to interviews with factory workers, trade union officials from the two trade unions organizing in the manufacturing and textile industry SMAWU and SPRAWU, and the federations to which they are affiliated, the SFL and SFTU were interviewed. Also, community activists, including those in social movements (both political and non-political) and traditional leaders were interviewed so as to get a complete picture of local dynamics (A complete list of these interviews is provided in the bibliography).

Arguments, by Janesick (2003) amongst others, that the benefit of a qualitative research is that it provides a ‘thick’ description of the case being studied formed a basis for the methodology chosen for this study. Furthermore, Ragin (2000) argues that qualitative

research allows for the formulation of new concepts and refinement of the theory based on findings of the study.

Greenstein (2003) acknowledges one of the shortcomings of qualitative approaches such as the case study method – that of representativity. Case studies can explore the specific, since samples of broader populations are not used to generalise from. In this case it was impossible to draw a random sample of all textile workers in Swaziland. A different approach was required. Instead, this project relied on a case study of one textile firm (for workers' views) which was then used to explore possibilities that may have a wider significance. In essence, the study used a snowball sampling method, i.e. it started from well known targets who were then asked to refer the interviewer to other possible participants. As mentioned earlier, this is a follow-up project to an initial exploratory study; hence it had to use the same methodology in tracing the original interviewees.

This method can be biased by limiting a fairly representative cross-section of participants, but it nonetheless suits this project because considering the scope of the project, it proved to be cost efficient, less time consuming and the initial targets referred the researcher to credible additional participants. For the preliminary study, seventeen workers from TEXREY were interviewed and issues such as working conditions, urban-rural links, and household income and composition were explored. The second interviews with these workers were aimed mainly at assessing their involvement in various forms of resistance both inside and outside the workplace.

In addition to the factory workers, a further twelve participants were interviewed, including trade union officials, community activists, members of political organizations and traditional leaders around the Matsapha area. Three of the targeted workers in the second cohort could not be interviewed as two had since passed away, whilst the other has changed place of residence and could not be located at work. However, one of the respondents is also no longer with TEXREY, but is self-employed, but she was interviewed because she had been part of the first study. The data analysis therefore

draws on the data gathered for both the exploratory study as well as follow-up interviews conducted for this study.

Having learnt lessons from the exploratory project with regards to issues of access, another attempt was made to enter the workplace without success. However, some of the interviews finally took place just outside the factory premises whilst others were done at the workers' places of residence. For unknown reasons, the Asian firms' mode of operation is clouded with some secrecy, and every time bureaucratic instruments are invoked so as to frustrate the efforts of information gathering. However, snowball sampling, fitted in very well in this project as according to Greenstein (2003), it is suitable for 'difficult to reach' people.

The research was also aimed at digging for both general and personal experiences, especially from workers and this touched on some ethical concerns. For example the historical background of families and the questions around health issues in the workplace required a measured approach from the interviewer. Furthermore, due to the uncertainty over the nature of existing relations between workers and management, respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the research exercise. Those that were still uncertain were made aware of the voluntary nature of the study, and that they reserve the right not to participate. Finally, a clear outline pertaining to the aims and objectives of the study was made to each participant before they committed themselves to participate.

The workers who participated in the interviews had an average age of 22 and out of them only one was male and the rest were females. Only one responded was married, but out of the unmarried, as many as thirteen stay with their spouses (boyfriends / girlfriends) either occasionally or on a full-time basis. Only three are 'properly' single in the sense they stay alone either at home or at place of work. Their level of education also ranges from primary education to tertiary level with one respondent having only a primary education, and only 1 having gone as far as tertiary. The rest only reached secondary school, with all dropping out at different stages.

Furthermore, the respondents were representative of all the regions of Swaziland, i.e. Shiselweni, Lubombo, Manzini and Hhohho. Only 1 respondent is a South African and had apparently worked at a textile factory in the Eastern Cape and then migrated with some Asian factory owners to Swaziland. However, what is not clear are the circumstances under which she is employed, i.e. as a Swazi or as a South African since this also relates to issues of work permits. Also significant is that only 1 respondent comes from an urban area, Mbabane, and the rest come from rural or semi-rural areas, which is a sign of the rural-urban migration. To understand this rural/urban migration may also require a proper understanding of the history of Swaziland and its class characterization, as shall be seen in the next chapter.

The rest of the study is subdivided into three parts. Chapter 2 focuses on the structure of the changing Swazi working class. Chapter 3 attempts to understand whether this new structure leads to forms of social agency – i.e. a countermovement. The final chapter, Chapter 4, concludes the research report.

CHAPTER 2

TEXTILES AND THE SWAZI CLASS STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

The nature of any countermovement that emerges is largely defined by the class structure that exists in that particular society and to a lesser extent, developments taking place at a global stage. Hence, this chapter focuses on the *structure* of the changing Swazi working class. It will be argued that in Swaziland, the rapid growth of the textile sector has reshaped the character of the existing class structure, and more importantly has laid the basis for an emergence of a countermovement. This will be shown by looking at the textile industry at a global level and how this has impacted on the Swazi textile workers, in particular on their attempts to resist the ‘commodification of their labour’. In essence, a proper analysis of the current class structure in relation to global forces should lay a basis for a discussion on whether we are indeed moving towards a countermovement.

2.2 The textile industry

Textile trade at a global level has been governed by the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) whose role was to set the rules for international trade, specifically “the amount of imports of textiles and clothing from ‘developing’ to ‘developed’ countries” (Choudry, 2002). It governed trade in the textile and clothing industry through a framework of bilateral agreements and sometimes unilateral actions that established quotas limiting the amount of imports to countries whose domestic industries were facing damage from rapidly increasing imports, such as China.

However, the MFA was finally phased out on the 1st of January 2005 and this has brought a degree of uncertainty for lesser developed countries, especially in Africa and Asia. The

involvement of China in the WTO with its “seemingly limitless supply of cheap labour” has also brought to question “the viability of textile and garment industries and jobs in other exporting countries” (Choudry, 2002).

A major critique of this agreement as highlighted by Choudry (2002), has been that it was unfairly used by transnational corporations to secure quotas intended for developed countries, thereby forcing smaller firms to join them or close down, which then allowed them to dominate the industry. Alternatively bigger countries set up shop in smaller, less developed countries so as to gain an advantage. For example, investors from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore set up plants in Cambodia to take advantage of the improved market access into the USA under the first US-Cambodia bilateral textile agreement (Choudry, 2002). Since 2000 the same trend has continued in sub-Saharan Africa, whose textile industry is also dominated by Asian giant firms.

However, Appelbaum (2004) sought to differ by arguing that the immediate beneficiaries of this quota elimination are predicted to be consumers. The reasoning behind this is that quota elimination will reduce the costs of textile products because production will shift to the lower-cost countries, although he does acknowledge that workers in both less developed and developed countries will suffer. In essence, workers in all countries will lose, but the developed countries themselves will benefit, but this, one would argue, does not necessarily mean that consumers will benefit.

AGOA is linked to the MFA but was specifically established for the purposes of providing African countries with tangible incentives to continue liberalizing their markets and also creating a level playing field for developing countries’ access to US markets (DPRU, 2001). According to the DPRU (2001), the enactment of AGOA was a ‘landmark’ as it expands beyond the benefits provided by the Generalised System of Preference (GSP). According to some statistics, trade between the US and eligible sub-Saharan countries increased from \$19 billion in 1999 to \$29 billion in 2000, representing a 50% growth and this is credited to AGOA (AGOA News).

The impression that one gets by looking at the bilateral trade profile between the United States and beneficiary countries in the sub-Saharan region is that there has been a big economic improvement. For example, an AGOA bilateral trade report (2004) indicate that through trade with the US under AGOA, Lesotho's trade balance has increased from \$-319,658 in 2000 to \$-139,869 in 2005, whilst for Swaziland it improved from \$-103,424 to \$-71,768 within a similar timeframe.

Using the above countries again, in analyzing their specific exports to the US under AGOA, the above picture changes completely, especially after 2004. US textile and apparel imports from Lesotho in 2002 were worth \$321, 049 rising to \$456,010 in the year 2004 before falling to \$99, 749. From Swaziland the US imported textiles and apparel worth \$89,088 in 2002 and that quickly increased to \$178,719 by year 2004 before dramatically falling to \$42,961 in 2005 (AGOA News). The above figures seem to indicate first a general crisis within AGOA but also an impact that may have been caused by the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement.

Through AGOA, eligible Sub-Saharan countries are exempted from normal GSP requirements but are still expected to satisfy certain requirements that include "an effective visa system, record keeping, labelling and direct shipment" (DPRU; 2001). There are concerns however about some of the AGOA terms, especially its non-negotiability and the United States' right to unilaterally cancel any country's eligibility. In essence, AGOA has noble aims of boosting trade and opening opportunities for developing countries, but it also create new challenges for the very same developing countries with stringent controls and unilateralism.

2.3 The textile industry in Swaziland

Swaziland was initially left out of the AGOA programme due to its poor human rights record as exposed by Amnesty International amongst others. After much negotiation (that also involved labour) the country was included and this led to massive investments in the textile industry. The Swaziland textile industry of the modern era took off in 2000 when

Asian investors opened factories to take advantage of the US trade benefits from AGOA and to sidestep the quota restrictions. The minister of enterprise and employment pointed out that the textile industry grew from 3 to 24 firms in 2003, creating 45,000 jobs in a country of approximately 1 million people (T.O.S, 2005). At the moment it is said to be generating about E600 million per annum in exports to the USA through AGOA (Observer, 16/07/2005). Whilst most of them are situated in the Matsapha industrial site, others have located in other regions such as Lubombo and Shiselweni.

It was predicted that “three in every four jobs will be lost by the end of June 2005” in Swaziland and Namibia. And true to this prediction, whilst the employers are grappling with the economic dimensions of this crisis, “workers in Lesotho have been retrenched in large numbers, some put on short term employment (only called when their labour is needed) and in most instances employers just vanished without even paying their workers” (Star Newspaper, 2005). According to the Lesotho textile workers union (LCAWU), the short term employment is not a solution and is tantamount to “criminal abuse of workers” because “survival is virtually impossible for anyone on short term” (Star Newspaper, 2005).

A similar scenario is unfolding in Swaziland whereby a study by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has concluded that the local textile industry which was founded largely on preferential access to the US markets through the provisions of AGOA is on the verge of collapse due “to price competition from the Far East and the scraping of quotas” (Weekend Observer, 2005). Whilst in the past the industry used to employ more than 40 000 people, the problems facing the textile industry in Swaziland have resulted in the loss of 10 000 jobs. Furthermore, it normally generated about E600 million per annum in exports through AGOA, but the direct competition with larger, low-cost economies such as India and China has had a negative impact (Weekend Observer, 2005).

Gillian Hart (2002) also did an interesting study on the textile firms in Kwa-Zulu/Natal whereby the factory owners attributed the factory problems to laziness, illiteracy and

ingratitude of the employees. Her study reveals that the most violent confrontations took place between Taiwanese industrialists and leaders of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). Like in other third world countries, the source of the confrontation was the exploitation of workers that seems to be a permanent feature of Taiwanese owned textile factories. She further argues that the design of the work environment in these factories does not create hardworking and disciplined workers as desired by the Asians but only creates a “powerful and palpable resentment that hangs like a pall over the factory floor” (Hart, 2002; 156).

In essence, Hart attempts to explain the problems within the textile industry (in the South African context) by looking at the small ‘family firms’ in particular and the Taiwanese industrial organization in general. Her argument is that, it is precisely this attempt to impose ‘imported’ forms of industrial organization that leads to low productivity and confrontations in the firms. To what extent though, is this true of TEXREY and what role does this play with regards to the anger and resentment shown by its employees? Furthermore, can TEXREY be seen as a typical Taiwanese textile factory that exhibits the same organizational patterns and a potential seedbed for an explosive workers’ movement?

2.4 TEXREY: The factory

The interviews were carried out at TEXREY, a Taiwanese owned garment factory which has its headquarters in Taiwan. However, most of its senior employees are from mainland China, although it was said that there is some difficulty in dealing with mainland China in terms of business. Outside Swaziland the company also has other branches in New York, China, Mexico and El Salvador. Diplomatically, Swaziland is only one of three African countries that recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country and unsurprisingly, one of the reasons forwarded for TEXREY’s investment in the country is “to strengthen relations between the two countries” (Interview, Dlamini, L.). Another reason is that the managing director of TEXREY used to work in Swaziland sometime ago and he ‘liked’ the working conditions, although it is not clear how exactly those conditions were.

TEXREY Swaziland has four branches including a spinning factory by the name of TITEX. However, there are efforts underway to establish a “one big multi-purpose factory that would take as many as 10000 workers” (Interview, Dlamini). The original factory from which the interview workers were employed has since been divided into two, with the other wing now called Kartat Investment. Ideally they are now two different entities although in practice they share the same premises and some workers have been transferred from one side of the factory to the other, supposedly under different ‘employers’. The single and biggest TEXREY market is the United States of America (USA) and major clients include Wal-Mart, K-Mart, JC Penny and Reebok. Whilst the cotton they use is sourced from countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Somalia, other material is sourced from Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Singapore.

Of the over 300 employees at TEXREY the highest position occupied by a Swazi national is that of Human Resource Manager. However, there are at least three black personnel officers and there are 12 Asians from countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, Sri-Lanka, Singapore and South Africa who are part of junior management (administrative staff). In the history of the factory, there has only been one Swazi administrator, who was later “sacked for unclear reasons” (Interview, Dlamini).

Amongst other things, management raised concerns about labour costs being high in Swaziland and this is said to continuously affect business negatively. Furthermore, the problems within the textile industry are attributed to the fluctuation of the rand/dollar exchange rate which was at 12 Rands to a Dollar in year 2000 when most of the factories came to Swaziland, but has now shifted to around 6 Rands to a Dollar. This affects Swaziland in the sense that the Swazi currency (lilangeni) is linked to the South African Rand, whilst the producing countries do not have a say in the setting of prices for the goods.

Other business problems have been the escalating production costs especially because Swaziland does not have a seaport to facilitate shipping. The U.S also “plays a great role

in monitoring labour standards” (Dlamini; Interview) and due to a perceived threat of terrorism, the US sends its agents to Swaziland so they can scrutinize every container before it leaves the country and this leads to shipping delays. However, based on the interviews with factory workers and respondents from the office of the labour commissioner, local labour standards are still a major concern and therefore not everything can be blamed on external factors such as delays in shipment. There are also many unanswered questions regarding the problems of escalating labour costs faced by these companies because, most of them enjoy unprecedented benefits under AGOA and the GSP.

TEXREY like most Swazi textile firms is a beneficiary of AGOA and there were concerns by management about the contestations on AGOA between government and the trade unions. From the factory management’s perspective this is bad for both the textile workers and the textile industry in general. In particular, both labour and management representatives are of the view that regardless of industrial relations problems within the workplace, “at least people are working and are able to put bread on the table” (Interview, Dlamini). Another official also argued that “half a loaf is better than nothing, especially if those criticising the half-loaf have got a full loaf” (Interview, Motsa).

The textile initiative under AGOA started as an Export Processing Zone initiative which included a tax-free clause and other subsidies such as free water, free electricity and free ‘factory shells’. However, government has since scraped the 5 year tax-free clause or any other special concessions and there are no more subsidies including free rent. In essence the factories have to pay rent for the factory shells and all other services and this is one striking difference with other case studies such as RAMATEX in Namibia as articulated by Jauch (2003). Other factories such as TUNTEX in Swaziland own the shells and are at liberty to partition them out so as to reduce rent costs. Through the ‘wage freeze agreement’ the textile employers’ association (STEA) has sought to push government to re-introduce the previous incentives such as free water and electricity, on top of the wage cut that was agreed to by unions.

Furthermore, TEXREY and other textile companies are fully owned by Asians although AGOA is supposed to benefit Swazi business people in Swaziland. According to textiles officials, “government or the royal family through Tibiyo Taka-Ngwane does not own any shares in any factory” (Interview, Motsa/Dlamini). In fact it is said that government and the labour department are “not even involved in luring them to the country as that duty belongs to the Swaziland Investment Promotion Authority (SIPA). Their argument was that government and the labour department are only involved is so far as playing an advisory role to these companies with regards to safety measures” (Interview, Motsa/Dlamini).

However, this is also questionable because, the very same SIPA is an investment body created by the king and dominated by royally connected businessmen and are accountable to the king amongst others. Secondly, the minister of enterprise and employment has been quoted in a number of media publications in Swaziland reminding everyone about the goodness and benevolence of the king who always find time from his busy schedule to go and scout foreign investors that would boost job creation. This act of being a royal spokesperson has only served to fuel suspicions in some workers that “the minister of Enterprise and Employment is also in cahoots with the Asians (Interview, Worker 1 and 5) whilst another made an observation that the “company bosses never fail to present the king with gifts on a regular basis, whilst pleading lack of profits” (Interview, Worker 9).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of globalization has impacted heavily on the textile industry and has had negative consequences. This has been further compounded by the tinkhundla economic restructuring measures as discussed earlier. Some of the more obvious consequences have been the lack of job security and low wages which have also been further compounded by the wage freeze agreement which was signed between trade unions, government and employers. Even without the minimum wage, textiles employers have long demonstrated an unwillingness to at least meet the minimum wage as stipulated by government. All this has led to workers establishing alternative survival strategies, as a coping mechanism as shall be discussed further in the findings.

A majority of the interviewed workers stay in the Matsapha industrial site vicinity, specifically Magevini and Mangozeni areas where they pay a rent ranging from R160.00 to R400.00 per month. The rent issue points to an observation that a large number of textile workers are migrant workers and this has an impact on their livelihoods outside the workplace. Only one participant stays at her permanent home and commutes by bus every working day. The Mangozeni and Magevini areas are both walking distance from the TEXREY factory hence all the other respondents walk to work thereby saving on transport costs.

In a normal working day they work from 07h00 to 17h00, which makes 9 hours, but in cases of working overtime, they knock off at 21h00 and the company ‘organizes’ transport for them. However, they still have to pay for that ‘organized’ transport. Overtime work is voluntary for those who want to supplement their income, but it is compulsory for all if there is a big international order that has to be met within a particular time-frame. Overtime allowance pays the normal hour rate on weekdays but pays a flat rate of R50.00 for a nine-hour day’s work if it is on a Saturday. The amount of work is mainly determined by “the particular order for that week, which means if there is a big order, management will set a higher target and if workers complain about the amount of work, they are accused of arguing back”(Interview, Worker 6), which is a punishable offence.

It is during this period that they end up working compulsory overtime either on weekends or after hours, because if they rush through the order and make mistakes along the way, it can result in an assault (being slapped with an open hand) or being suspended for a few weeks. It is also during this hectic period that a worker can get up to three warnings, “either for working slow or for rushing through and making mistakes” and a suspension in a day’s work (Interview, Worker 6).

Most participants stay with their partners and or relatives of up to three at place of work. This excludes the respondent staying at home who is living with six people including his mother. Interestingly, thirteen the respondents live with their spouses, some of them

employed some unemployed. It does seem like a trend that as soon as they get employed, then they immediately get a live-in partner and reasons for this trend are better left for another research. Furthermore, five respondents stay with their kids at place of employment's residence and only one of them does not have dependents, while others only have one, usually their only child, although they also support other siblings. Also of note is that most of these workers, often with their rural backgrounds, have continued to maintain these relations, hence the question on whether they form part of the working class or not. To get clarity of this question may require that we discuss the history of Swazi society and its class structure, especially the emergence of a royalist comprador bourgeoisie as a class stratum.

2.5 The Swazi proletariat and its structure

Simelane (2003) and Levin (1997) go into detail in tracing the development of the Swazi proletariat in the past century. Simelane in particular argues that the process was not necessarily a full proletarianization process because "Swazi peasants never experienced a complete transition to proletarianization" (Interview, Simelane). A clearer characterization of the Swazi class structure is provided by Davies, O'Meara and Dlamini (1986) and they trace it to the period of 1915 whereby peasants were forced to engage in wage earning activities so as to be able to pay hut tax. On the other there also existed a significant section of foreign capital competing for the share of the economy with the settler bourgeoisies. Alongside this alliance was what Davies, et al (1986) termed the 'dominant class' and it consisted of the royal family and chiefs, better understood as a royalist comprador bourgeoisie.

This also brings to question the nature of the working class that can be said to be existing in Swaziland if any. To be able to answer this question it becomes imperative to understand what makes one a worker, when does a worker become a worker and most importantly, do these workers who are a focus of our study see themselves as workers. If a proletariat is to be understood in the context of someone who survives only by selling his labour, then these workers can certainly be seen as part of the proletariat. But

seemingly that is where it ends, as the workers seem to define themselves as a working class only in so far as they wake up every day and go to work. However, the fact that some of them dedicate most of their weekends to going home and engaging in agricultural activities presents another dimension. To this end, it can be argued that this new working class does not signify a pure proletariat but a semi-proletariat class structure. Davies, O'Meara and Dlamini, et al (1986) go to the extent of analyzing the links between elements of this class, i.e. the proletariat and the semi-proletariat, classes that historically have a lot in common.

However, this class is by no means the most dominant class in Swazi society and this can be attributed to its emergence which has been at the mercy of the royal regime through the institution of chiefs. Also in terms of numbers it is not necessarily the biggest and most dominant. According to statistics from the department of labour, the number of employed Swazis both in the private and public sector in year 2000 was at approximately 95 000, which is almost equal to that of 1996. Although the manufacturing sector, which also incorporates the textile industry, contributed to the slight increase in jobs, this has been offset by the retrenchments in other sectors. This figure also represents a slight improvement from the figures of 1981 which stood at approximately 80 000. As Davies, et al (1986) suggests, these figures include the middle class and professionals who are all in wage employment. It can therefore be speculated that in a population of 1.2 million a total of less than 95 000 employed people (excluding the middle class, who are a creation of the tinkhundla regime) signifies a very small proletariat and semi-proletariat.

2.6 New or old generation working class

The factory used as a case study is only four years old and the involvement of Asians in the Swazi textile industry is a relatively new thing although there are two textiles factories that have existed for over fifteen years and are not linked to AGOA. However, TEXREY workers seem to represent a new kind of 'working class', a working class that does not see itself as such, in essence a working class that has not undergone a complete transition. Looking at their family history and the activities of their parents and

grandparents, almost half the respondents demonstrated little or no knowledge of those activities. None of their parents or grandparents had a history of working in the textile industry, although the textile industry has existed for quite some time.

Instead, there seems to be a pattern of the respondents' grandfathers working in the South African mines and this opened a way for their grandmothers to come and sell handicrafts in South Africa as well. The sale of handicrafts happened on a part-time basis, especially when the ploughing season was over. However, the latter generation (parents) shifted to employment in the agricultural sector and the civil service, although they maintained their own subsistence farming activities. The current generation seems to have shifted even further by seeking employment in factories and looking for alternative survival strategies outside farming, save for a few. The similarity here is that all the generations can be characterized by migration to seek for jobs, although the older generation was a cross-border migration whilst the current is a regional migration.

This also indicates a shift of Swazi society from being an agrarian society based on subsistence farming into an industrialised factory based society although at a smaller scale. There is also an indication that these workers come from large families of average income, usually of not more than two breadwinners. Unemployed family members usually have little or no education and therefore little prospects of getting employed. On the other hand, unemployed parents are usually engaged in tilling family fields (subsistence farming) and or looking after family livestock. Thus we have a semi-proletariat that is still subjected to what some activists would describe as the whims of a royalist comprador bourgeoisie.

CHAPTER 3

FROM STRUCTURE TO AGENCY: TOWARDS A COUNTERMOVEMENT?

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the focus shifts from structure to agency. Given the history of labour and political struggles in Swaziland and given the fact that the massive growth of the textile industry has significantly altered the composition of the Swazi class structure, how possible is it then, that we are likely to see the emergence of a countermovement that will resist the ‘commodification’ of its labour and ultimately dislodge the Tinkhundla regime. Certainly, a bigger textile industry means that more workers are at the disposal of trade unions. Furthermore, the working conditions at the factory would suggest that workers have a lot of grievances that can be used as a basis for their resistance. Therefore, by looking at the workers’ responses, the state of the labour movement, political organizations and civil society at large, this chapter will assess if developments in the textile industry have signalled a shift towards a countermovement.

3.1.1 Responses

The interviewed workers are of a relatively young age and have limited experience with regards to formal employment. Only 5 of them had any prior work experience before they came to TEXREY and that experience varied from 3 months to 15 months. Out of this experienced 5, only 3 had ever worked in another textile factory whilst the others (Interview, Worker 2 and Worker 9) had either worked in a restaurant or a retail store.

However, their experience at TEXREY ranges from 3 months to 24 months at time of interview. Furthermore, only 3 respondents are employed as casuals while the rest are permanent employees. In fact, “workers are sometimes employed as casuals for three

months and then get re-hired again for three months as casuals”(Interview, Worker 8), contrary to what the Labour Relations Act says with regard to the probation period. The result of this is that some workers become ‘casual employees’ for a whole year, although when it comes to random dismissals employment status does not matter.

Tasks and roles at TEXREY are gender based with male employees assigned what would normally be considered ‘masculine’ jobs. For example, male employees work in the maintenance department as mechanics and drivers. According to the data collected, males are delegated to tasks such as packing, loading, pushing trolleys, cleaning the yard and stores/dispatch. On the other hand, females perform tasks historically seen as feminine, such as laying, sewing, trimming, cutting, pressing, ironing, labelling and quality control.

In line with the tasks they perform, the designation given to the workers include machinist, technician and quality controller, amongst others. Each section/ department has its own supervisor and each section has got 12 lines with 12 line supervisors, hence the official tag of ‘line supervisor’ and ‘section supervisor’. Most contestations and confrontations between workers, supervisors and management occur in these section lines.

3.1.2 Salary and incentives

The workers interviewed including the line supervisor earn a monthly salary ranging from R290.00 to R1000.00. However, if one excludes the supervisor then the ordinary workers earn a monthly salary of between R290.00 and R500.00, although they get paid on a two-week (fortnight) basis. Based on some of the responses, there are no ‘real’ benefits and allowances, although they are charged R20.00 a month for pension fund (Lidlelantfongeni). However, the workers’ salary is so low that it is not even taxable; hence they miss out from a number of employment benefits. Furthermore, some are not very clear or informed about the deductions reflected on their payslips.

There is also a clinic inside the factory with a ‘questionable’ purpose and level of service, which is however free of charge. Some workers are of the view that “the clinic provides

us with expired and none effective medication which is unsafe and a waste of time” (Interview, Worker 1, 3,4,5,7 and Worker 11). Others were also of the view that the reason there is a clinic inside the factory is “because management wants to keep us inside the premises so that we can continue working even if we say we are sick” (Interview, Workers 2, 6, 7, 8, and 10).

However, there are some incentives or benefits provided by management for workers to ensure that they do not come late to work and for not being absent. Usually, they get R20.00 a month and R40.00 at the end of a year, although they are also charged R20.00 themselves for coming late or threatened with expulsion for being absent. They seem to be unhappy though, with these fines and some of them said they would scrap it off at the first chance if they were allowed to. Five of the respondents complained that they do not get the mentioned allowances and do not normally work overtime. “We are promised R40.00 at the end of the year if we don’t miss even a single day at work during the year but come end of year we do not get anything and some of our colleagues are already fired by that time” (Interview, Worker 9).

The salaries earned by the workers are insufficient and way below the government stipulated minimum wage of the manufacturing industry. In more than one occasion, respondents contribute food and money to their dependents at irregular intervals and based on need and urgency. The amounts contributed range from R20.00 per month to R600.00 a year (either once-off or in smaller sums) and at least half of them contribute for either school fees or crèche fees. As a result, some pointed out that they “cannot afford to buy food and pay rent on a monthly basis” (Interview, Workers 2, 3, 9) whilst others said that by the time they have done this they are left with nothing to send home.

This can also be seen from the meagre possessions that they have since they started working and the fact that they are “unable to get loans and credit facilities due to their low income” (Interview, Worker 1). This inability to access proper credit facilities have forced a number of these workers into the arms of loan sharks, a situation that they have struggled to get themselves out of. None of the interviewed workers have worked at

TEXREY for more than two years and only five had any work experience prior to working at the same factory. As a result, only 5 of the respondents own a TV set and only 3 own a refrigerator (including the one who stay at home) and only 1 own a DVD set. However, more than two thirds of them have basic household items such as a bed, a table, a two-plate stove and a radio. But this is still insufficient if one look at the fact that only two have so far managed to buy a bedroom suite and a kitchen unit which they sent to their respective homes.

At least two female participants (Interview, Worker 8 and Worker 10) cited their boyfriends as dependants whilst the male respondent also cited his girlfriend as his dependent. One female respondent (Interview, Worker 4) cited her mother-in-law as a dependent, and there was also an extreme case of 15 dependents in a family of 17, whereby the only other provider is the father. Also of note was that the respondents come from extended families, in which according to Swazi tradition, it is an obligation that whoever is employed in the family should support the unemployed.

3.1.3 Industrial relations and concerns

There seems to be a general feeling amongst the workers that there is little to celebrate about their jobs. Asked what they would point out as the most satisfying about their job, 10 of the interviewed workers clearly stated that there is nothing good. Some went as far as saying that “there is nothing good...it’s hell in there, and I am not going back again” (Interview, Worker 6, 9 and Worker 10). As a sign of the differing levels of treatment for workers based on hierarchy, only one respondent argued that “the management is good but the only problem is the Asian bosses”(Interview, Worker 4), a perception that elevates supervisors into the a level of junior management as opposed to senior Taiwanese managers.

In essence there seems to be different views and attitudes towards the various management structures and these are informed by one’s level of occupation on the workplace hierarchy. Other views are that “the Asian bosses are even better than the

black management” (Interview, Worker 6) whilst others claimed to have heard the Asian employers telling their work colleagues that “they stink” (Interview, Worker 2 and Worker 5). Ironically, the so-called black management consist of supervisors, personnel officers and the human resource manager who do not really have any decision making powers.

Rather than praising their jobs, the respondents dwelt on the negative things happening at the factory and the grievances varied from safety concerns, nature of the work and the industrial relations. Amongst other things there is an element of favouritism in the work place in the sense that “work is not given according to one’s skills even if you are more experienced than your colleagues” (Interview, Worker 6). The role of educational background seems to be of little significance in terms of job allocation and becomes a source of conflict between workers and supervisors and amongst the workers.

An unclear disciplinary procedure can be seen as a huge factor in the random dismissal of workers by management, because not even a single respondent was aware of the company’s disciplinary procedure when asked. However, there are verbal ‘disciplinary’ warnings for petty issues such as chatting or chewing a gum during working hours. If for example, one is caught chewing gum during working hours, “the line supervisor (often Asian) takes the gum out and stick it onto your hair and if he sees you talking then he pinches you” (Interview, Worker 2). There were also concerns about workers not being paid if they take many sick days-off, something that is again against the labour law. Others also complained about the lack of tea breaks “whilst management enjoys endless tea breaks” (Interview, Worker 7).

Safety concerns are mainly related to the chemicals used on the yards being highly toxic yet workers are not given protective equipments such as dust masks. Some workers argued that “we are only given protective equipment when there is going to be a health/labour inspection by the labour department” (Interview, Workers 2, 3, 5, 9). On the other hand, the labour department puts the blame on the workers by arguing that “it is the

workers' duty to ensure that they are given protective equipment or else they should refuse to work" (Interview, Dlamini, G.).

The factory has a two week break during the December holidays; hence there is no annual leave for workers. However, this causes problems because they are not allowed to take time-off to attend to family matters such as funerals during the course of the year. If they happen to take a sick-leave, management does not accept letters from traditional doctors as confirmation and insist that workers check in at the local clinic inside the factory premises.

3.1.4 Problems at work

Generally, there seems to be a lot of problems within the workplace, at least from a workers' point of view as suggested by their responses towards internal factory developments. Asked on what they could change at the factory if they were part of management, all workers had a point of convergence on at least some of the critical workplace issues. For example , Workers 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10 all mentioned the increase of salaries and increased lunch hour, whilst , Workers 1, 2,6,7,8, 10 again mentioned the issue of providing safety equipment (dust masks). The conclusion here was that they feel more or less the same pinch and have more or less the same ideas on how things could be improved in the factory.

One or more of the workers mentioned an improvement of labour relations, good bonuses and better communication methods as areas that they would immediately address.

However, it was observed that the male respondent was not concerned about the upgrading of the internal medical facility or a longer, paid-for maternity leave. Instead it was argued that "female employees deliberately shun maternity leave until the last minute because they want to spend as much time as possible at work to ensure they do not lose a lot of money"(Interview, Worker 10). This suggests that the outcome of a non-paid maternity leave is a situation whereby workers end up giving birth right within the factory premises.

This raises a lot of controversy around the well documented issues of employees giving birth within the premises of textile factories and during working hours. At least one respondent recalled of a case whereby an employee left for maternity leave and by the time she came back, the company had long hired someone as her replacement. Furthermore, the factory seems to have an unwritten policy of not hiring pregnant women, real or imagined, on the pretext that it affects productivity. In an extreme case, one respondent mentioned that she would “get rid of the whole textile industry” (Interview, Worker 5) and this demonstrates a deep seated anger within some of the workers as informed by their daily experiences.

3.1.5 Survival strategies

The limited income of the workers in relation to the amount of time they spend at work and the number of dependents means that they have to engage in extra activities in order to supplement it. Unsurprisingly, all respondents are involved in some form of retail activity, with 7 of the respondents engaged in activities such as selling eggs, buying and selling clothes (bought from Johannesburg), selling health products, and Tupperware items. Others survive by running vegetable stalls on weekends, lending out money to colleagues at work (and charging interest), doing radio and TV repairs. One respondent mentioned that she supplements her wages by part-timing in prostitution which has become a thriving business around the Matsapha area but this could not be probed further for ethical reasons.

Either due to frustrations in the workplace or due to experience in small scale retailing, or both, more than half the interviewed workers’ aspirations include owning a business and the nature of businesses ranges from hair saloons and spaza shops to retail clothing businesses. Others want to work in the army (Interview, Worker 8) and in the Fire and Emergency services (Interview, Worker 3), whilst others (Interview, Worker 2 and Worker 6) want to go back to school to further their education.

Only one participant who is already a trade union member registered a wish to become “a trade unionist and represent workers against oppressive employers” (Interview, Worker 1). The conclusion drawn from here is that all the interviewed workers want to move away from the textile industry and start afresh somewhere else. The seriousness of their wishes to leave the textile industry has so far been backed up by their attempts to save money, look for advice on future careers and going for business skills’ training.

3.1.6 Workers and supervisors

The study revealed that resentment is not only between workers and management, but it also impacts on supervisors who are supposed to be a link between the two. Of all factory floor workers interviewed, only the supervisor reserved her comments about the conduct of management, although she had some problems with the attitude of some workers. The issue was that workers generally have anti-authoritarian tendencies and “simply hate you for being a supervisor as if you chose that position... and this is because of jealousy for the position and the pay” (Interview, Worker 10). However, a few of the workers did not see anything wrong with supervisors; in fact they viewed supervisors as a necessary link between workers and management, because managers are usually confined in the office.

In contrast, only one participant out of all factory floor participants had a positive view about supervisors because they represent workers well at management and “the problem is not with the supervisors but with the subordinates” (Interview, Worker 7). She also argued that “at least they understand personal and family issues better than management, so they can be relied upon” (Interview, Worker 7). Others though had different views, like... “they (supervisors) always try to impress the bosses and in the process sell out the workers” (Interview 1) or “the supervisors hate us and they influence the bosses to sack us” (Interview, Worker 6). Others feel that “they betray us and I think they get paid for this” (Interview, Worker 4) and others believe that they are just innocent victims of a war between supervisors and management because “if management shout at supervisors when something goes wrong, the supervisors in turn shout at us”(Interview, Worker 3).

Some workers also felt that the supervisors take their work a bit too serious and this affects the good relationship they would otherwise have with them. Even if “something insignificant happens, they unnecessarily take that issue to management so that they can be seen to be executing their duties” (Interview, Worker 3). Besides, they are seen by workers as being too close to management because “they drink tea together and have lunch together” (Interview, Worker 2). However, as much as they can be seen to be close to management, it became clear that they are not part of any decision making process.

Furthermore, supervisors are thought to be biased in the sense that they “have their own favourite workers whom they treat as friends whilst they treat the rest of us as ‘enemies’” (Interview, Worker 3). These tensions between workers and supervisors are likely to continue if there is no clear criterion on how promotions are implemented and if qualifications and experience are not taken into consideration. Furthermore, this is likely to continue if the tasks of supervisors are not clearly defined and explained to workers.

3.1.7 Workers and management

Workers who have problems with the working conditions also tend to have problems with management and according to seven respondents; the company management is ‘bad’, and “only cares about you as long as they can extract your labour, for next to nothing”. For example, some of the Asian managers pinch, insult and spit at workers if they (workers) make mistakes. In essence, they expect workers to be perfect and punish them for the slightest of mistakes (Interview, Worker 7).

Tendencies of aggression, inhumane treatment of workers, irregular working hours, unsafe working conditions, suspensions and arbitrary sacking are some of the issues that feature in almost every respondent’s description of management. However, the biggest ‘obstacle’ the workers face seem to be the human resource manager according to up to seven respondents, because he “thinks he is the general manager” (Interview, Worker 3). Others argued that “the top bosses are okay; the problem is only with those managers at the factory” (Interview, Workers 2, 3, 9).

Due to these existing problems some of the workers have actually responded by resorting to withdrawal tendencies as a coping mechanism. Withdrawal for these workers has come in the form of some of them quitting the industry altogether and getting involved in retail activities. One of the follow up interviews was conducted with a former worker who has since stopped and concentrated fully on her retail business. According to her, she is “better-off now that she is self employed because she does not have to work long hours for less pay under unbearable conditions”. Furthermore, she is “making more money in a month than at TEXREY without putting a lot of effort” (Interview, Worker 11).

3.1.8 The Inkhundla and government

Swaziland uses a constituency based political system popularly known as tinkhundla. Although it is a traditionally based system, the tinkhundla centres are located in both urban and rural areas. The textile factory used in this study is located under the Kwaluseni inkhundla which is also next to the Matsapha industrial site. Normally, tinkhundla centres are government controlled and therefore a domain for traditionalists and conservatives, whereby the chief often plays a big role.

However, the emergence of textile factories seems to have brought some animosity between these two structures (government and community leaders), as the constituency feels that “government excludes and marginalizes us from all its industrial and development activities” (Interview, Dlamini, A.). Whilst they do not necessarily claim to be industrial and developmental experts they still feel that since the industrial site is located in their territory (constituency), they should be part and parcel of any investment initiatives under their constituency. For this reason they argued that “government seems not to know what she is doing or supposed to do when it comes to investment and development” (Interview, Dlamini, A.), but this does not necessarily mean that they are anti-government.

As community representatives, they demonstrated an unusual awareness of the alleged unbecoming developments within the factories, such as the abuse of workers by the Asian employers. The influx of the textile factories has somehow directly affected them as a community, with regards to crime and commercial sex work, amongst other things. In recent years there has been a marked increase in the rate of commercial sex work in and around Matsapha, particularly the last five years. Although, no study has been conducted as yet, in order to prove the link, it can not be disputed that the rise in commercial sex works co-incided with the arrival of Asian textile factories.

Furthermore, the Matsapha area and Mbhuleni in particular is known as the hub of criminal activity in the whole of Swaziland. From the inkhundla's point of view, the problems of crime and prostitution are a result of the Asian factories that pay low wages and those that close down. It is argued that workers, particularly female workers "engage in commercial sex work so as to supplement their meagre salaries whilst male employees engage in criminal activities for the same reasons" (Interview, Dlamini, A.). And as the companies close down, a high number of people are left jobless and resort to such activities on a full-time basis.

Again, no study has been undertaken to prove this, but it is a fact that a large part of textiles workers are 'migrant labour', with a rural background and few relatives around the city, that there is a high employee turnover rate in the textile industry and that employees who lose their jobs do not immediately return to their permanent homes. The community's biggest concern, however, is that young local children will copy these unbecoming behaviours from the 'migrant' workers and that such behaviour impact negatively on the image and reputation of the area.

In essence, the community leadership is unhappy with the lack of development as a result of this investment and they have argued that "there has been deterioration than a development of Matsapha in particular and Swaziland in general". Instead they have been, they argue, "victims of an unplanned /disorganized kind of development that has led to the mushrooming of rental flats that become havens for criminals and prostitutes"

(Interview, Dlamini, A.). The bone of contention is that these rental flats are unplanned, unregulated and consume a lot of land. This in turn affects development in the sense that there is no more land left for playing grounds for local kids. Furthermore, the textile factories do not only “consume large amounts of water” but there are also “suspicions of water pollution which could affect local residents” (Interview, Dlamini, A.).

The constituency leadership’s view is that “if the Asian employers cannot be kicked out of the country”, then proper developmental projects should involve the local inkhundla, although “with or without the Asian factories, the development of the Matsapha /Kwaluseni area would be the same” (Interview, Dlamini, A.). For example, it was suggested that government should subsidize local landlords by building rooms /flats, in an organized manner, so that they (landlords) can lease them and pocket the profits.

3.2.1 Unions at TEXREY

Two manufacturing unions organize in the textile industry, namely the Swaziland Printing Refinery and Allied Workers Union (SPRAWU) and the Swaziland Manufacturing and Allied Workers Union (SMAWU). The latter is an older union affiliated to the SFL and is well represented in the workplace while the former is an affiliate of the SFTU and has been involved in ‘turf wars’ with the older union. TEXREY is only one of two factories in which both unions organize simultaneously, a situation that has led to disastrous consequences in the other factory. Interestingly, some trade union members at the factory believe that they belong to the SFTU as a union, not as a federation and this raises questions about communication levels between the union and its membership.

The main TEXREY factory at which the case study was done employs over 300 workers and SMAWU has got more than 50% membership. In all the four TEXREY factories (branches) combined, the union has got 458 members, which is effectively more than 50% of the whole workforce. This can be seen as quite an achievement taking into

consideration the anti-trade union tendencies by Asian managers and the Swazi government and also the general apathy from workers towards unions.

A classic example of the Asians' negative attitude towards trade unions was witnessed at the Santa Lou textile factory in 2004. This factory openly refused to enter into a recognition agreement with SMAWU even though the union had already attained the minimum 50%+1 membership required for such an agreement. After finally succumbing to pressure, it reluctantly signed the agreement, but then closed down just two weeks later citing the shortage of orders from their clients. However, the very same union re-emerged the following year (2005) under a new name but same old management and never bothered to recall its former employees. At a national level SMAWU has up to 7000 members whilst SPRAWU has 1200 members.

Figure 3. Breakdown of SMAWU and SPRAWU membership

Year	SMAWU	SPRAWU
2000	2500	-
2001	2000	-
2002	3500	-
2003	5000	-
2004	7000	1200

Adapted from: Annual Report (2005), Department of Labour, Kingdom of Swaziland

However, there also seems to be a higher level of trade union apathy from the workers due to amongst other things, “inefficiency of the trade union..., lack of information about the trade union activities within the factory” (Interview, Worker 7). As much as lack of information can be attributed to trade union inefficiency, it can also be attributed to the fact that most of these workers are still new in the workplace with an average experience of six months. This worker apathy has further translated itself into fatalism, whereby the workers seem to have entered a state of hopelessness with regards their situation. In more

than one instance the respondents kept on suggesting the “there is nothing we can do” or “what can we do” and some went as far as saying that “our fate is in the hands of God” (Interview, Workers 2,3,5,7,8). The apparent lack of will by the trade unions and the department of labour to intervene on their behalf, the lack of other job skills and educational qualifications and the dim prospects of getting better jobs elsewhere all seem to have been factors that led workers to reach this stage.

3.2.2 Workers’ views

Swazi workers cannot be said to be entirely happy either with the existing industrial relations or with the socio-political system. Given a chance, they suggest, they would “improve the economy, provide social welfare and employment” (Interview, Worker 9). Furthermore, they would “get rid of the monarch, its cronies and the tinkhundla system as a whole” (Interview, Worker 6) or even “chase the Chinese out of Swaziland” (Interview, Worker 10). In essence, workers showed an ability to identify things that need to be corrected not only in the workplace but in the country at large. They further demonstrated an ability to establish a link between the ills of the workplace and the ills of the political system in the country. For example one worker argued that “the factory I work for is run just like the tinkhundla system” (Interview, Worker 6), a comment that suggest that some workers have an understanding of the political system.

It also transpired that workers join unions for various reasons such as being influenced by friends or promises made by union officials. Beyond the promises of union benefits and coercion, they demonstrated a limited general understanding of internal workplace structures and the role of trade unions regarding these issues. This could be attributed to the general lack of information and education with regards to these issues and sometimes a deliberate concealment of such information by management, supervisors and union officials. In essence, the efficiency of the union in collecting subscriptions does not match its efficiency in servicing its membership.

Often workers complain that “the union people do not tell us anything; all they do is to collect our money (subscriptions) at the end of the month” (Interview, Worker 9). For example, workers are randomly disciplined, assaulted and fired without adhering to proper disciplinary procedures and the workers “have reported these issues to the union and they said they will look at the matter, but they have not done anything as yet” (Interview, Worker 7). The inhumane treatment points to a lack of understanding of these procedures by workers or even a lack of these procedures in the workplace. Even if the workers lose their jobs, “there is no post-employment assistance for retrenched members from the union and company” (Interview, Worker 7). However, the union officials argue that a worker can be a union member and enjoy trade union benefits for up to three months after termination of employment, something that the workers dispute.

Instead of improving, conditions seem to have gotten worse since these workers joined both SMAWU and SPRAWU (Interview, Workers 2, 3, 6, 7, and 9). This soft approach adopted by the trade unions has led some workers to even suspect that “the union officials are colluding with the employers in exploiting the workers” (Interview, Worker 7). The contestation between trade union officials and the membership plays itself out clearly in the ‘wage-freeze’ agreement that was signed between government, the employers’ association and the trade union. The workers feel that they were short-changed by the trade union officials as they entered the negotiations without their (workers) backing and “they never gave us any feedback” (Interview, Worker 6). Whilst all three structures, that is the trade union, government and the employers are happy with the signed agreement, the key players in the form of employees are not entirely happy.

3.2.3 Problems in the bigger federation

Not all the problems faced by the union (SMAWU) and the biggest federation (SFTU) are as a result of government and employers’ attitude. Whilst it is true that government has taken the side of capital in suppressing the working class, information gathered through this study suggests that the unions, both SMAWU and SPRAWU are also victims of their own doing. For example most workers argue that the only time that they see the

union leadership is when there has been a protest action by workers within the factory premises and even then they only lock themselves in the management's offices. The only other time would be when they want to discuss issues of subscriptions and stop-orders.

Furthermore, the organizational structure of both unions seems to be non-functional and as a result affects both the growth and effectiveness of the unions. For example, there is no pool of shop-stewards that is supposed to do the work of the union within the factory. None of the interviewed workers was a shop steward or was aware of any shop steward within the factory. This has resulted in a total loss of faith in the union and to sporadic protest action by workers over isolated issues in the workplace. Furthermore, it has resulted in a situation whereby it is the union's national leadership that rushes to the factory to 'solve' problems instead of local leadership. Added to these structural constraints is the management's anti-union tendencies, whereby they threaten to close down their businesses at the slightest 'provocation' by workers.

The same internal problems are evident within the SFTU to which SPRAWU is affiliated and to which some of SPRAWU's leaders also occupy offices. For example, the General Secretary of SPRAWU is also the Deputy General Secretary of the SFTU and whilst they are struggling to solve workers' problems at union level they are expected to solve them at a federation level. The structural problems also extend to the SFL and its affiliate SMAWU and recently have reflected itself in a situation whereby for the second year running the 1st of May (Workers Day) in Swaziland has been celebrated in three different places. This is quite an unfortunate situation that has brought to the open serious cracks in the labour movement that have been covered in wall paper for a long time.

The Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) as the biggest federation with 25 000¹⁸ members has been the biggest let down for the Swazi working class and its own biggest enemy. Although a worker federation is supposed to be bigger than an individual, in the SFTU the general secretary has been exposed as a captain in charge of an

¹⁸ Based on an interview with the SFTU deputy General Secretary membership stands at 25 000 although the Department of Labour puts it at 29 341

uncontrolled union bureaucracy that has bred a monster and loose cannons to the detriment of the working class. Furthermore, tendencies of certain leaders within the federation have overtime tended to mirror those of the custodians of the royal status quo, a view that is shared by some of the interviewed workers.

Based on some of the interviews it is clear that for years the leadership of the SFTU which has ironically had one general secretary for the past 22 years has misled Swazi workers regarding the struggle for democracy in the country. Some of the outcomes of the interview conducted with the general secretary could not be corroborated by any of the other respondents including those who have served with him in office, including the former president. At stake here seems to be the issue of who is supposed to be the genuine leader of the Swazi liberation movement¹⁹ and the contestation is clearly between labour and political organizations. Whilst theoretically leaders of all the movements are working towards one goal, that of seeing a successful countermovement that will ultimately destroy the tinkhundla regime, in practical terms some seem to be working towards the destruction of the very same countermovement.

The workers' struggle in particular seems to be centred on an individual who has been aided by what would be seen as sycophants posing as praise singers in the literal sense. This kind of behaviour has gone to an extent that the general secretary is often carried shoulder high at certain worker gatherings including May Day celebrations and given what would be seen as 'royal treatment', which is a controversial term indeed. In this way it could be argued that an element of patronage has been created within the labour movement. Patronage and despotism has also manifested themselves into a situation whereby the general secretary is "the only one who wears certain union apparel with the SFTU emblem, while the rest of the workers' duty is to kneel down and sing praises for him" (Interview; Magongo). This 'royal' and despotic behaviour, often seen in Mswati suggests that workers have now inadvertently created yet another oppressor.

¹⁹ Liberation movement in this context refers to political organizations, labour movements and all other pro-democracy groupings

The tensions also play themselves out when some of the federation leaders never miss a chance to talk ill of leaders of other trade unions and democratic forces in all international forums, such as the annual ILO gatherings. At these ILO gatherings, the SFTU leadership in particular has systematically mislead workers both local and international and the international community at large about the political situation in the country and in the process taking the credit as the champions of democratic change who constantly bear the brunt of state brutality. The pattern embarked upon by elements within labour seems to be that of an individual to “hijack the genuine people’s struggle and confuse it, or divert and delay it, but at the same time, be positioned by his masters as the real force for change” (Interview, Masuku).

For example, the union leadership has conveniently forgotten over the years to highlight major political events such as the 1990 treason trial of PUDEMO leadership and the consistent arrest of SWAYOCO members as part of the struggle for democracy. However, the same leadership as suggested by some of their reports to ILO points to PUDEMO as “the main problem in Swaziland, even more than the Swazi government”. Immediately after the arrest of PUDEMO leadership, the general secretary of the SFTU who happened to be at the ILO conference in Geneva issued a statement denouncing PUDEMO leadership and “calling for the state to ensure prosecution” (Interview, Masuku).

Furthermore, he promised that “the SFTU will collaborate in providing evidence against people who break the law” (Interview, Masuku) and this also applied to SFTU members were also PUDEMO members such as Zodwa Mkhonta. Again this seems to play in the hands of those from the political organizations who are of the view that one of the reasons for the arrest of the PUDEMO leadership in 1990 was the collaboration between the state and elements within the SFTU leadership. Although this could not be independently verified, it was however confirmed that PUDEMO leadership questioned the corrupt tendencies of the SFTU bureaucracy at its stronghold in Bhunya, something that was unheard of at the time (Interview, Magongo).

This onslaught has not only been directed at other political organizations but also at unions who are affiliates of the very same SFTU. Currently a number of its affiliates including SNA, SNACS, STAWU and SATU have been suspended. Although it has been suggested that their suspensions were as a result of not paying their subscriptions, leaders of the suspended unions argue differently. From information gathered it seems evident that the suspensions are the work of a “cabal of politically undernourished and ideologically bankrupt cohorts located in the armpit of the SFTU general secretary, who act as the bulldogs and gatekeepers of his interests at all times” (Interview, Masuku).

These elements’ stated task have been to denounce and discredit all forms of questioning as politically motivated and orchestrated by the enemies of the SFTU within PUDEMO. Following from this, it can be argued that the general secretary has been able to establish a bunch of sycophants around him whom he rewards with crumbs from his of corrupt tendencies and legalized theft of workers resources. The alleged corruption in particular has manifested itself in allegations of “bribes received from companies for selling out workers, through collaboration in retrenchments and victimization of workers” (Interview, Magongo). It was also revealed that at some point in time there were even ‘consultancies’ that helped workers with training and business skills to which the SFTU leadership was linked, although they have disassociated themselves from this.

In light of the above allegations, this creates an impression that some SFTU leaders were promoting retrenchments because they were benefiting through retrenched workers and were deliberately refusing to fight privatization and the massive job losses in the country. In fact in a newspaper interview the general secretary was quoted as saying that “government should not go for wholesale privatization but engage the associations and the federations about alternatives” (Swazi Observer, 2004) thus suggesting that the retrenchments are not bad as such, except that union leadership should be involved.

Furthermore, the culture of democracy that is lacking from the tinkhundla regime seems to be also lacking from the labour federation. As mentioned earlier, the general secretary in particular has been occupying the same position for over twenty years and nobody

seems to know what the constitution says in this regard. The best way of ensuring that such takes place is through the creation of a subordinate but effective network through promoting corrupt trade union leaders. In essence, the leadership of the workers' movement or some elements within the leadership has created a complicated mechanism that deals effectively with workers who question his corrupt tendencies.

The inability to deal with issues of corruption and unaccountability also stems from the poor organizational structure of the federation or its non-existence. This has led to workers being unable to question the financial accounts of the federation because there are no proper structures from where such issues would be deliberated. As a result little is known about subscription fees and the reasons why its offices have in the past been closed and its property confiscated. The organizational structure is so confused such that the office is run by non-elected officials (observed during the interview). Major decisions are also taken by some of these officials in the General Council, "without proper accreditation and mandate from workers" (Interview, Magongo).

The reason for the breakaway of SUFIAW from the SFTU to form the SFL was "due to the intolerable levels of corruption by Sithole, not to be a government union as suggested by the SFTU" (Interview, Ncongwane). Other unions that have subsequently left the federation, through suspensions, have all cited the same issues of corruption and unaccountability as the source of all the tension. Currently, the same levels of tension still exist due to some outstanding problems that have not been resolved and these have the potential of dividing workers even further. These problems include contestations that some SFTU leaders were actively involved in encouraging government to refuse to register the SFL on the promise that they (SFTU) "will control all strikes if they do not register certain unions" (Interview, Ncongwane).

It is also argued that part of these divisions is also influenced by international funders who may have their own agendas. For example, some argued that the SFTU leadership "uses the recent funding of R4 million from FNV (a Dutch union) to promote worker division and destabilize other unions, by bribing corrupt individuals to positions of

leadership” (Interview, Nkonde). In at least one occasion these serious tensions have resulted in physical confrontations, for example when the plantation workers of Tabankulu Estates in the Lubombo region “beat up Sithole and refused that he represents them again” (Interview, Masuku).

According to the general secretary, the labour movement has been consistent in calling for democratic reforms and its sustained pressure in collaboration with other democratic forces led to the formation of the CRC that was to draft the country’s constitution. However, as recent as in 2006, the very same general secretary went to the national media to plead with all workers to heed the king’s call to attend the CRC sessions at the national cattle kraal. In the following days, pictures of him kneeling down and making a submission inside the kraal were shown by the same media, the Times of Swaziland.

From the leadership’s point of view this was a brilliant tactical move aimed at exposing the futility of the whole constitutional exercise. But based on various interviews, especially with the political organizations, it vindicated a long held belief that some elements within labour are in fact collaborating with the enemy. It also vindicated long held “suspicions that some elements within the federation’s leadership are receiving money and rewards from these hostile forces and use it to bribe other weak and reactionary unionists to advance the agenda of dividing workers and confusing the democratic struggle in general” (Interview, Masuku).

In essence, the labour federation is so riddled with internal problems and despotic tendencies such that it needs to deliver itself from the clutches of the tinkhundla system before it can be recognized as a countermovement capable of overthrowing the same system. However, tendencies of dictatorship and unaccountability as witnessed from its last national congress, “attended by less than 50 people, whereby financial reports were not even scrutinized” (Times of Swaziland), suggest that there is still a long way to go. On a positive note though some of its leaders still claim that “Swazi civil society is talking in one voice and still say the same things even when separated, all we need now is to act in unison and that is inevitable, it is only a question of time” (Interview, Sithole).

This may suggest that there is still a hope for a unified working class movement in the country. However, before this hope to become a reality, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done so as to root out despots within the workers' movement. This is even more important because if individuals hold a workers' movement into ransom, then by implication they hold the whole Swazi working class into ransom. And this plays right into the hands of the tinkhundla regime which would like to see the workers divided.

3.3.1 Despots in the workers' movement

To clearly understand the problems within the labour federation and by extension the problems of the Swazi struggle, it would also be useful to understand the person of the general secretary, who of late the organization has come to resemble. According to one of the respondents and to existing documentation, even before the historic workers' struggles of the mid-1990, the general secretary was already attending "secret meetings to which he was not mandated by the broader membership of the federation" (Interview, Magongo).

These meetings convened by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in Botswana in 1991 raises a lot of questions as most progressive unions during that cold war era were still affiliated to the more 'progressive' World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The irony is that whilst the SFTU sought to fight the tinkhundla regime that was imposed by colonial masters, it also found itself in the same bed with the ICFTU that was largely believed to have been formed by the CIA and served as agents of imperialism. It could be argued that this is the reason why COSATU and other progressive African labour movements were not affiliated to the ICFTU at that time.

The record of the Swazi labour movement on the international front also suggests that there are still serious challenges to the emergence of a strong countermovement in the country. For example, at the height of its dealings with the ICFTU in 1990, the SFTU leadership publicly condemned COSATU for "interfering in SFTU matters and wanting to politicize workers" (Interview, Masuku) after being questioned about lack of internal

democracy and accountability by workers. This also took place just before the SUFIAW breakaway and ironically a very identical statement has been issued by the same leadership in 2006 seeking to castigate COSATU.

The on-off relationship between the labour federation and the political organizations has also resulted in attempts by the SFTU leadership to form a labour party as an alternative. The idea around this initiative was to recruit within the ranks of PUDEMO and its youth wing the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO) especially its activists from the university and the union movement into this project, without knowing their political allegiances. However, during the 1996 mass action by workers, the general secretary of the SFTU “tried to sideline PUDEMO and SWAYOCO, but realized that he can only rely on these tested cadres for real action” (Interview, Masuku). In subsequent worker forums he pronounced that “PUDEMO failed to take power when he had laid a through-pass for them” (Interview, Masuku), thereby alluding the continuous survival of the tinkhundla regime to PUDEMO’s failure.

In a nutshell the past five years (since 2001) have presented the Swazi labour movement with serious challenges from a social, economic and political point of view. Yet at the same time that period has presented the labour movement with an opportunity to rise up to the challenge and establish a giant working class movement that has the capacity to seize power into its own hands. The above mentioned period has seen a large number of jobs being created in the textiles industry but also massive retrenchments in the same industry on the one hand and escalating poverty levels on the other. Ideally, the textile industry should have therefore been the stronghold of the labour movement by now.

Furthermore workers’ rights are still highly undermined by some employers in the textiles industry regardless of supposed protection through the Labour Relations Act. Others still refuse to recognize trade unions regardless of whether they have met the minimum membership required. Most have even flouted the minimum wage requirement as stipulated in the government gazette whilst government officials are given exorbitant salary and benefit increases. The issue of uncontrolled government expenditure has also

directly affected the working class in the sense that money that was supposed to pay for their scholarship is used elsewhere. This means that they can't go to tertiary institutions and end up in textiles employment whereby they face perpetual threats of losing their jobs through retrenchments.

Government also seems to have taken a systematic approach towards excluding workers from some of its 'empowerment' programmes, which could be viewed as government's attempt to contain the working class. For example, the government recently (2005) engaged in a business skills training exercise so as to help people start their own businesses through a state fund. However, this exercise took place on working days and this excluded the textile workers in particular, as they were told by their employers that if they leave then they "should leave for good" (Interview, Worker 7). This is a similar situation to the CRC sessions that also took place midweek and thereby excluded workers. However, workers who want to go to national cultural activities are allowed time off. Instead of growing and becoming stronger, the post 2000 period has corresponded with a decline of the SFTU, much to the satisfaction of the tinkhundla regime and capitalism.

3.3.2 Disintegration of the SFTU (post-2000)

Based on the workers day celebrations of the past two years (2005 and 2006) it is easy to conclude that the SFTU is undoubtedly facing a crisis since it emerged from the shadows of the 1980's. The last few years after the inspiring 1994 -1998 mass actions have seen a serious disintegration of this once giant federation both ideologically and numerically. Evidence can be seen through the declining number of unionized workers, withholding of subscriptions due to allegations of corruption and the suspension of STAWU, SNACS and SNA from the federation. Whilst it is true that these unions were suspended after they had stopped paying their affiliation fees, the SFTU bureaucracy have sought to confine the problem to merely that. However, it has deliberately failed to note that the issue goes beyond subscriptions and is very much a protest action about the bureaucratic, corrupt, unpopular and opportunistic tendencies of Sithole and his cohorts.

The massive retrenchment in the plantation industry, a traditional stronghold of the SFTU, has been countered by a sharp increase of the textile industry due to Asian textile factories responding to the Africa Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) initially meant to benefit Swazis. Regardless of the extreme exploitation of workers going on within these factories, the SFTU have been unable to mobilize these workers into unions managing only 1200 in the whole industry. A recent research reveals that even in those factories where SPRAWU (an SFTU affiliate) exists, the union is not serviced and non functional. Some of the workers interviewed even suggested that the union is in cahoots with factory management whilst others observed that the union is “only good in collecting our subscription fees instead of protecting workers” (Interview, Worker 9).

Even more embarrassing was that some of the members cannot make a difference between the SFTU as a federation and SPRAWU as an affiliate, exposing a serious lack of worker education within SFTU unions. This realization also point to a direction that says there is a deliberate attempt by the bureaucracy to stifle the emergence of a new generation of leadership, refusing to implement worker capacitating programmes. Examples include Sithole’s outright refusal to recognize the Workers Forum, a non partisan workers’ initiative aimed specifically to capacitate workers by providing trade union education and its research wing, the Workers’ Academy. However, in true fashion of authoritarian bureaucrats, he came out guns blazing to accuse everyone of interference.

The accusations of union leadership and factory management collaboration do not seem to be far fetched considering what has been going on in recent times at federation level. Some of these selling out tendencies began in earnest as Mswati’s government upped its pace of privatization through the ISAP, whereby instead of defending the workers and fighting the demon of neo-liberalism, the SFTU leadership got swallowed up by the process. It is not surprising that some of the high ranking members of the trade unions were the first beneficiaries of the outsourcing exercise.

This is further reinforced by Sithole’s shameless call on the workers to attend without fail Mswati’s constitutional circus at the national kraal at Ludzidzini in 2005. Therefore,

contrary to Masuku's argument, the SFTU bureaucracy has also banded together with those who are a source of worker oppression in Swaziland. A recent research conducted by this author (Simelane, X. 2005) also revealed that an SFTU affiliate (SPRAWU) together with SMAWU entered into a two year 'wage freeze' agreement with employers and management but without a clear mandate from the workers. All this was done in the name of 'saving jobs', an ancient, face-saving song favoured by trade union bureaucrats. In a recent newspaper interview to justify non-participation in the border blockade the general secretary of the SFTU was quoted thus; "before they (Sithole and friends) could consider joining a protest action they need to consider that there are jobs and the economy of the country that needs to be protected"(T.O.S, April, 2006).

The divisive tendencies of the bureaucracy have played itself out as Sithole seems to thrive in the current disintegration of the federation. In the build up towards the border blockade (13/04/05) he again lobbied some union leaders unsuccessfully against this worker protest. Some of the reasons forwarded for this reactionary behavior were that COSATU's invitation is "like inviting a person for dinner, if he agrees to join you, then you feel good but you cannot be hostile to him for turning down your invitation. The SFTU has a right to reject the invitation after considering certain things" (Observer, 04/2006). This raises a big question as to whether the federation bureaucracy is still in the same boat with the workers or with the enemies of the workers and the working class.

A dangerous trend of crying foul and interference and whose solution is to further divide the workers, is also emerging. For example, the past two years have seen three different worker formations holding workers' day activities at three separate places. But instead of taking an active role in calling for and actually working towards a single federation, the SFTU has continued to shoot itself in the foot by shunning some of these groups and even worse got itself embroiled in the formation of splinter groups at union level. In essence, it seems not to be for the idea of a single big countermovement and this raises the question if there is really a future for labour Swaziland.

3.3.3 Possibilities for labour

It would be unfair to suggest that the whole workers' federation is a source of misery for the Swazi working people, meaning therefore, that there is still a possibility to transform itself into a serious countermovement that is worth the name. For this reason, the challenges faced by the labour movement can be placed squarely on the shoulders of a few power crazed, greedy individuals with hidden agendas, yet masquerading as genuine representatives of the Swazi workers. But the unfortunate truth is that with them relentlessly holding the reins, the SFTU is doomed as a genuine voice of the workers and with pride in the way, the labour bureaucrats are not about to own up to the mess they have created. Until such time that the workers as a collective wake up from their slumber and realize that the federation is bigger than an individual, then sooner the federation will belong to the dustbin of history.

Having realized that the federation is bigger than an individual, the next step would be to identify who is the real enemy of the Swazi working class. A sad truth is that as things stand the union leadership is bent on instilling in the workers a narrow and distorted view that the Swazi royal regime has nothing to do with the rampant worker exploitation thereby opportunistically laying the blame only on the employers. That would mean that the bureaucracy has to realize that PUDEMO and other progressive forces are correct in challenging the royal status quo as a custodian of both local and international capital and therefore an enemy of the working class.

To correctly identify the enemy of the working class, as a necessity, also requires a correct ideological orientation. It will be argued therefore, that for the SFTU to be taken serious as a force and for it to be reclaimed from the enemies within, it needs to adopt a 'working class theory' as a guiding light. A correct ideological orientation can go a long way in helping the union to develop proper strategies to fight against the bourgeoisie, to adequately handle the neo-liberal restructuring madness whilst in the process restructuring itself organizationally. Moreover, it could stem the tide of political prostitution as exhibited by Sithole, as he hops from one forum to the other in search for

personal glory. Recent examples include his involvement in the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and the Swaziland Coalition of Concerned Civil Organizations (SWACCCO) again without the mandate of the general membership of the unions. However, this observation should not be interpreted to mean that workers should isolate themselves from civil society (community) issues.

Unfortunately, the federation has “only waxed lyrical about fighting privatization whilst failing to do anything of substance except being involved in so-called consultancies that are working towards convincing workers about the ‘beauty’ of privatization” (Interview, Magongo). It is the duty of the federation to educate its membership that structural adjustment policies never worked in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina and there are no convincing reasons why the ISAP should work in Swaziland. Failure to do so only plays into the hands of the oppressive industrial bosses, the corrupt union leadership and to a larger extent the corrupt and illegitimate tinkhundla regime.

Adopting a correct ideology will also mean putting greater emphasis on worker education. By implication this means an end to the monopolization of information by the union leadership so that they can appear to be more knowledgeable and in the process render themselves as indispensable in the eyes of the membership. It is exactly this tendency that has sustained Sithole as the SFTU’s general secretary for over 20 years, even longer than Mswati’s dictatorship. Educational empowerment, amongst other things, calls for an end to a tendency of always (self) deploying the secretary general to every conference and forum outside Swaziland, regardless of its significance. To this day “no worker understands why it is always Jan (Sithole) who goes to Geneva for the ILO conference every year and the criteria used for deployment to such assignments” (Interview, Magongo; Masuku)).

The above also entails an understanding that the workers’ struggle is historically and by necessity an international struggle and therefore, instead of running to SATUCC and the

media like spoilt brats to announce the banning²⁰ of COSATU, Sithole and his clique should instead work towards strengthening these international ties. In essence, it is high time the federation revisits its deployment strategy so as to capacitate a larger pool of its cadres on international work. More importantly, there is a need for the opening up of space and the embracing of workers initiatives such as the Workers' Forum and the Workers' Research Academy in their efforts to empower and educate Swazi workers. If this is allowed, chances are the federation and the individual unions will be able to develop alternative strategies to counter the tinkhundla restructuring exercise.

In an effort to reach the once claimed 80 000 membership that formed the basis of the golden years of the 1990's, the SFTU needs to work towards the goal of one industry-one union and one country one federation. In essence, the SFTU needs to get off its high horse and begin to engage its estranged ex-members in negotiations to end the impasse. It also needs to begin efforts to engage the SFL, SATU and SNAT with the view of integrating them in to the SFTU. But this cannot happen unless inflated egos cease to influence the leadership's thinking and until this leadership realizes that it is no one but the tinkhundla aristocracy that benefits from a divided workers movement.

Furthermore, there is a serious need for organizational renewal within the SFTU, i.e. a need to take the federation back to the workers in the factories. This can put to rest the confusion between a federation and an individual. But this will also take a great deal of effort in empowering shop stewards and other lower tier members of the federation. Crucially, it will put an end to cases of federation interference in issues that can best be handled at union level. Furthermore, it will allow other existing but non-functioning structures such as the National General Council to be more involved in the running of the federation and driving it towards proper democratic union elections instead of the Piggs Peak circus²¹.

²⁰ Following the border blockade fallout, Jan and some SFTU leaders announced the banishment of COSATU in Swaziland on charges of 'biasness' in its mediation efforts.

²¹ No one seems to know the SFTU constitution and the expiry terms for leadership positions. In 2005, an impromptu congress was called in the last minute in remote Piggs Peak attend by less than 50 delegates for a federation that once commanded an estimated 80 000 membership.

This chapter does not necessarily suggest that is all doom and gloom for the SFTU as far as the Swazi working class struggle is concerned, but as already outlined, valuable lessons have to be learnt if the royalist and capitalist tinkhundla demons are to be tackled. COSATU serves as a good example of an assertive ideologically grounded labour movement in the face of the apartheid monster and Chiluba's ZCTU serves as yet another example of a power-hungry, egoistic and ideologically bankrupt labour bureaucracy that sees itself as an embodiment of what the working class is all about. Only once this has been done can the SFTU be able to challenge some of the obstacles that hamper the emergence of a serious countermovement in Swaziland. Furthermore, there is a need to open up space for engagement with other pro-democracy formations, political organizations in particular.

3.4 Political organizations

Like the SFTU, Swazi political organizations are also undergoing a structural crisis and have not been able to entrench their hegemony over the working class in general and the textile workers in particular. Only three participants are members of political organizations, specifically PUDEMO and its youth wing SWAYOCO. Although both organizations are to a certain extent influential in the labour movement, some union members interviewed pointed out that they "do not follow politics or the current political situation in the country" (Interview, Workers 3, 7, 8,). Others though had critical views of the prevailing political situation in the sense that they feel that "the monarchy in particular and the tinkhundla (constituency based) system in general are holding back Swazi society... and ...are a cause of misery as they hinder development" (Interview, Workers 3, 5, 6, 10).

There is also a feeling that the problems in the workplace are not immune to the political developments outside it, hence "the king's powers should be reduced and he should become a constitutional monarch" (Interview, Worker 6). Regardless of the different understandings of the monarchy as an institution, the participants seemingly agree that the monarchy's existence does not do them any good, whether in the workplace or

outside. For example, Workers 3, 7 and 8 feel that “the whole monarchy system should be done away with”, whilst participant 10 feels that “not only the king but the monarchy as an institution should be scrapped”.

Outside the workplace, negative attitudes towards the monarchy are informed by the problems that participants have with their local chiefs in their permanent residences. In looking at the tinkhundla governance structure, chiefs are by implication an extension of royal hegemony as they act as ‘an eye and ear of the king’ in communities together with the local indvuna. Furthermore, as much as they have not yet got an opportunity to read and understand the current constitution, they have lost so much confidence in the system, such that they don’t believe that the new constitution will bring any changes, except entrenching the royal status quo.

Very few of the workers have recently participated in national activities such as elections or national cultural activities such as Incwala, Umhlanga and Lusekwane. A case in point is that all the participants only have a vivid recollection of the vusela exercises that took place in the 1990’, but are not exactly sure what they were all about. Whilst some were not aware of the vusela commissions’ visits to their local inkhundla, some of them just did not care to attend their sessions and a least one was at work (in another company).

On the cultural front, those who have participated did so for various reasons, including “financial allowance from parents” for attending umhlanga. Others went there because “it was compulsory because my father is closer to the royal family” (Interview, Worker 7) and so he insisted. A clear observation is that there was no passion involved and it was done only if there is no other choice or if it offers a financial reward or a good social outing. For example, one respondent said she used to like umhlanga because “it afforded her an opportunity to go the trade fair which co-incides with umhlanga” (Interview, Worker 4). It should however be noted that workers are actually allowed time off from work to attend national activities, which is yet another contradiction between tradition and the needs of modern capitalism.

Attitudes towards cultural activities are also linked to parents' attitudes to such activities. For example, if in a family, the mother is anti-cultural activities such as umhlanga, then the respondent also develop a similar stance. Furthermore, if one or both parents are anti-the current political establishment, then the respondent also shares the same view. In essence, their political views do not necessarily conflict with their parents' views and this can be explained through tight family bonds that characterize Swazi society.

Attitudes towards the tinkhundla system and attitudes towards trade unions have a particular impact on the choice of a role model for workers. For example, some workers cite the secretary general of the SFTU, Jan Sithole as their favourite leader and role model and a smaller number cite a former senator, Walter Bennet, who happens to make the largest noise on issues of corruption. Interestingly none of the workers cited the king or the leader of the liberation movement.

Whilst it can be argued that reasons for ignoring the latter could be that he leads an underground organization, it can only be left to speculation as to why the king does not feature, as one respondent openly stated that "I do not have a role model but certainly the king cannot be my role model"(Interview, Worker 6). Such utterances put to rest the mythical propaganda pushed by traditionalists that 'all Swazis generally like and look up to their king' because he provides them with jobs and is an embodiment of all that is Swazi, a view that is also held by Potholm (1972). However, it also throws a challenge to the various political organizations about the amount of work that still needs to be done, for them to be seriously regarded as a threat to the existing status quo.

3.5 Other civil society formations

Outside labour and political organizations, civil society represents the third arm of what could make up a successful countermovement in Swaziland. In the context of Swazi society and in the context of this paper, civil society will refer to a network of forces that organize outside the state and represent the interests of the different sections of society. These formations "do not necessarily represent the interests of the poor; in fact some are

even more conservative than their governments” (Masuku, 2002). The latter normally represent the agenda of forces elsewhere beyond the boundaries of the society they operate in. Others also get swallowed up by the dominant politics of their country or society and become irrelevant to the poor.

Over the years in Swaziland, a number of civil society formations, some issue-based, have emerged. Most visible amongst them has been the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), the Human Rights Association of Swaziland (HUMARAS) later re-named HURIDISWA and the Swaziland Coalition of Concerned Civil Organizations (SWACCCO). What made these organizations in particular to be visible and an interest to this study is that they are led by people with political connections and the fact that since political organizations are banned in Swaziland they remain the only legal political mobilization tools. In recent months the NCA has been involved in ‘negotiations’ with the Swazi government around issues of the new constitution and governance on behalf of the broader civil society. As much as their issues are correct, there are also limitations with regards to the approach of the NCA especially the tendency to seek change within the confines of the existing tinkhundla framework and the legalistic means to achieve that at the expense of political contestations.

On the other hand, SWACCCO which also includes business representatives has sought to push for change within the confines of capitalist accumulation. The problem with this is that it tends to subordinate the interest of the working class to the interests of the business class. This was more clearly demonstrated when SWACCCO successfully lobbied the labour federation to postpone a workers’ mass stay away because it was during the festive season and would therefore affect business. This suggests that for SWACCCO the primary goal is not to establish a massive working class movement that will paralyze the economy in the process of taking over power. Instead it is to make the tinkhundla neo-liberal agenda more sensitive towards the needs of certain sections of society with minimum sacrifice. This outlook towards neo-liberalism and the working class have also been shown by the chairperson of CANGO, an umbrella body of NGO’s,

who suggested in an interview that “government’s retrenchment of civil servants is to the benefit of these civil servants because they will get big packages” (T.O.S, 2006).

Looking at the above mentioned views from civil society groups it is clear that some Swazi civil society formations have become consultants on privatization, right-sizing, outsourcing, retrenchments and the general neo-liberal re-organization of society. This they do under the cover of fighting poverty which is their primary goal but find themselves trapped in a situation whereby they work against the interest of the working class. For example, no civil society group is on record as championing the interests of the textile workers and the daily misery they go through. As a result, Swazi civil society has demonstrated hesitation and ideological bankruptcy in confronting the evils of neo-liberalism and globalization. Just like in the trade union movement, this raises questions of individual leaders within civil society groups having personal interests in retrenchment processes at the expense of workers.

The role of civil society in Swaziland is also limited by the fact that it relies on the media with regards, to new developments since it does not have an alternative source of information. The danger of this is that in Swaziland all media houses are owned by the royal family (either wholly or partial) and are heavily censored, which means that the agenda of civil society is also directed by the regime. As mentioned earlier, the interests of government often differ from the interests of broader society; hence civil society should play a role in providing accurate information to other social movements for a successful working class struggle. However, in Swaziland civil society formations and NGO’s in particular find themselves becoming a proxy for royal state propaganda.

It can further be argued that the role of civil society in transforming society is limited by the fact that they almost exclusively rely on international donors for funding purposes. For example outside the Swaziland National Youth Council (SNYC), there is no other civil society group that is known to get its funding from government. It is unlikely that these international donors would just blindly throw in their money without having an interest in the agenda being pushed by these organizations, just like the tinkhundla

government has an interest in the activities of the Youth Commission. The argument therefore, is that if funders wield so much power through controlling the purse strings, then to what extent is the loyalty of civil society leaders to serve ordinary citizens affected. In essence, civil society formations in collaboration with their funders seem to be moving separately from the 'masses' that they claim to represent and in the process get their priorities confused. The recent march on parliament to deliver a petition organized by the NCA and attended by less than 100 people give testimony to this.

Over-reliance on international donors has also meant that civil society formations take a careful and soft approach in carrying out their programmes. In all society structures this is often disguised as a 'tactic' but in practice it is "a cowardly tendency that has the effect of selling out the working class" (Masuku, 2002). For example, when civil society groups, be it the NCA or CANGO, address the question of poverty and poor governance, they only limit themselves to narrow structural constraints of these issues. In this way they avoid tackling the fundamental and theoretical underpinnings of capitalism that lays the ground for these societal ills.

Such tendencies suggest that they have so far been unable to play an effective role in educating workers and the working class in general to organize themselves to overthrow the tinkhundla system. By the same token they have tended to be issue based, thus failing to make a link between the various problems that engulf the country. For example, most civil society groups in Swaziland have failed to make a link between the struggle for land, the fight for better wages, the fight for job creation and the rebellion against chiefs and other traditional authorities.

There seems to be similarities between the failures of civil society and that of other potential movements in dealing with the Swazi question. Some of these include the inability to wage campaigns on issues that affect people such as poverty and also broader issues such as governance. Civil society organizations have also been reluctant to put the blame of dictatorship and corruption at the door of the tinkhundla regime. For example since SWAYOCO members were arrested and charged with treason in early 2006 and the

subsequent allegations of torture at the hands of state security agents, not a single statement from civil society condemning Mswati's regime was made. Unfortunately this tendency exposes a history of fragmentation in the pro-democracy movement, as shall be further discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS

The study has initially sought to put to a test an existing theory or projection which claims that wherever capital migrates to, inevitably labour struggles will follow it. Silver (2003:47) argues that “as capital migrated from established sites of production , workers’ bargaining power was contained, yet new working classes were created in the locations favoured for industrial expansion”. With trends in developing countries being reflected in a global context, this form of capital migration, leads to the undesirable consequence of the globalization of poverty (Silver, 2003). More importantly, it is argued, it creates a vulnerable state and a vulnerable workforce. Ultimately, it leads to the ‘making and the unmaking and the re-making of the working class. Some of the findings of this research agree with this view whilst others do not. Indeed, a certain structure does not necessarily lead to agency. A range of contextual factors have to be considered.

First and foremost, the research findings revealed that the concept of the ‘making, unmaking and remaking’ of the working class, if understood in the context of investment, withdrawal and re-investment by private capital, is true to the Swazi textile industry. The research showed that all but one of the textile factories are foreign owned and all are susceptible to closure at the slightest provocation. At least one factory in the past two years have indeed withdrawn and re-invested. This threat of withdrawal means that this investment is contentious and unreliable, and it is not there to stay.

The reluctance to adhere to the minimum wage and other basic conditions of employment lends credence to the idea of a ‘race to the bottom’. The main reason why these companies choose to invest in Swaziland is because of the opportunities provided by AGOA, the cheap labour at their disposal and the lax labour laws. Based on the findings of this research, a race to the bottom has indeed proven to be a manifestation of poverty.

All interviewed factory workers live below the poverty line and are forced to resort to other means of survival beyond their salaries.

The findings also reveal that as labour migrates in an effort to avoid a confrontation with the working class, labour resistance inevitably emerges in the new sites of investment, which means that every new site of capital investment is a new site of labour struggles. Whilst the Swazi workers do not necessarily participate in national worker activities, i.e. national strikes, they always wage their own internal struggles inside the factory premises or at the point of production as Marx suggested. In essence, the textile industry as suggested by Silver does provide a fertile ground for labour resistance and the emergence of a countermovement as suggested by Polanyi, but to this point such efforts are still very limited and inconsistent in Swaziland.

It was further observed that the kind of working class being created by the influx of Asian investors, is what could be termed a gendered working poor, who do not even see themselves as a working class. Extremely low wages and an extended family of dependents, means that there are no prospects for personal development for these young workers. The high costs of living, in relation to the salaries earned show that now that they are working, they have become 'poorer'. However, they can not be said to be a new working class in the sense that they have parents who are formally or informally employed and grandparents who were migrant workers. The only difference could be that it is only recently that the textile industry has become a major contributor in terms of job creation. However, this new generation of workers, owing to family ties and the Swazi class structure, have also not undergone a complete 'proletarianization' process.

The research also revealed that the workers, although they are not into politics, are still quite aware of the political situation. Contrary to state media propaganda, that the king is the chief scout for foreign investors, the fieldwork proved that this is not the case and the workers are aware of it. Instead the arrival of Asian textile factories, particularly the ill-treatment of workers in the workplace, has had the impact of hardening the workers attitude towards government, because of its perceived passive bystander role. It has

fuelled suspicions of collusion between the Asian employers and government, hence statements such as *'lamaShayina a-Lutfo ayasigcilata'*²².

The findings also brought to question, the very notions of the commodification of labour, at least in the Swazi context. Polanyi argues that society is characterized by a double movement which is basically an action of two opposing organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods. Based on these principles and aims, workers in the Polanyian context, not only contest the commodification of their labour, but they also contest the attack on their livelihoods as well. Based on the findings of this research, the workers are not only partially proletarianized, but they also have other survival strategies beyond the workplace.

Furthermore and contrary to promises of skills development, the research results suggested that the textile workers do not necessarily gain any skills, technical or otherwise. Routinized and monotonous jobs such as packing, laying, pressing or knitting only a sleeve of a whole t-shirt can hardly be referred to as skills empowerment, especially if after the AGOA frenzy, the workers won't have anything to pack. Government still has a big challenge of ensuring that these jobs are localised both in terms of ownership and in terms of skills empowerment. As it is currently, it is only government and the textile company management that think it has played a development role in uplifting Swazis, although the evidence obtained through this study suggest otherwise.

All the above observations could be seen as creating the perfect conditions for the emergence of a countermovement, but as the research has established nothing of that scale is happening at the moment. But what are the constraints that are limiting this process? Based on the findings of this research, it will be argued that the constraints vary in nature, but most visible are those that are structural and legalistic. Issues of a

²² SiSwati version of 'Lutfo's Chinese friends are exploiting us' referring to the relationship between the Asian textile bosses and the Minister of Enterprise and Employment.

fragmented civil society, a deeply entrenched royal and traditional system that has successfully adapted to modernization add on to the fatalism as displayed by Swazi workers and therefore add to these challenges.

Three key issues can be identified to summarize these challenges and chief amongst them is the size and nature of the proletariat. As indicated earlier, only less than 100 000 people are employed in Swaziland and a large number of them are in public employment. Even those who are in private employment, the companies in the private sector also tend to be partly owned by the royal regime through Tibiyo TakaNgwane. To close down any space for dissent the regime often 'deploy' royal family members in the civil service and in the private sector. This is also done through deploying so-called contact persons in the Tibiyo owned companies. Unsurprisingly, these persons are either princes and princesses or loyal chiefs. For example, the current attorney general is a member of the royal family and his wife is the Director of Public Prosecution.

Therefore, the size of the proletariat in relation to the total population suggests that all odds are stacked against it. Also the fact that this small proletariat is largely concentrated in the textiles industry (40 000), which is a very fragile industry suggests that it would be difficult for these workers to 'go for broke' in terms of challenging the employers and government. This fragility has played into the hands of those who sell out worker struggles in the sense that they now emphasize the protection of jobs even in the face of obscene exploitation tendencies. The signing of a wage freeze agreement in 2005 is a perfect example of this tendency.

The second key area that serves as a challenge is that of fragmentation of the broader working class movement. This is what was earlier on referred to as structural constraints and it has legalistic connotations within it. The legalistic character plays itself out in the sense that as much as political organizations are banned in the country, civil society formations and trade unions are not banned. Therefore political organizations and political activists have sought to infiltrate these structures and have encountered serious resistance. For example the SFTU infighting that led to the ousting of its then president was more about an SFTU and PUDEMO confrontation, than anything else.

Furthermore, the disintegration of the SFTU into various small formations, of which some consider themselves as federations in their own right, has been a major challenge. This fragmentation can also be seen through the dismal failure of the Swaziland Democratic Alliance (SDA) to function, as some of its leaders are now in parliament. In essence, the divide and rule strategy as pursued by the tinkhundla regime seems to have wrecked havoc to any prospects of a serious countermovement. Although a new constitution is purportedly in place, it is still not clear whether political organizations are allowed to operate in Swaziland and this deliberate ambiguity seems to have been designed to maintain the stranglehold of the royal regime over Swazi society.

The last broad constraint is the use of culture, an area to which many scholars have referred to. Ntsebenza (2005) raises one critical issue around this subject, i.e. the legitimacy of traditional authorities being associated with their control of the land allocation process rather than their popularity. On the same point Levin (1990) pointed out that the political and ideological basis for repression in Swaziland was based on the creation of tradition and are inconsistent with democracy. It is an argument of this paper that the pro-democracy movement in Swaziland have found itself trapped within this 'ideology'. In the name of culture, the labour movement has desisted from staging mass demonstration during the incwala period and in many instances the labour movement and political organizations, PUDEMO in particular have found themselves having to justify to the public that they are not fighting against the monarchy system or the king in person.

This has compromised them in the sense that they have resorted to fighting for change within the confines of the very same tinkhundla system. Beyond culture, the tinkhundla regime has been able to successfully appeal to narrow nationalist and religious sentiments when faced with the might of the working class movement. This, it has done in two ways, the first being to portray the incwala ritual as a Swazi national prayer that seeks to re-establish the Swazi nation's ties with their god. Secondly it has been able to organize massive prayer services on every Easter holiday, whereby various church leaders re-enact

their vows of loyalty to the king and curse the various pro-democracy formations for being the work of the devil.

In essence, the findings of this research concur with Levin's observations that "opposition to royal hegemony has been disparate, uncoordinated and disorganized, and no serious counter-hegemony to royal rule has been developed" (Levin; 1997). As much as all the oppressed structures of Swazi society have a common issue with the monarchy, they have not been able to harness their issues under the banner of one big movement. In order to succeed, such counter-hegemony would need to draw in the oppressed and exploited classes among the peasantry who constitute the mass of the Swazi population, the urban proletariat and the middle class which is at the mercy of the royal regime. This is even more so because, the tinkhundla system is structured such that it spreads from the royal palace to an ordinary homestead in the village, and is largely defined by land relations.

Despite the fact that these sections of society are on the rough edge of repression in Swaziland, they have not emerged as an oppositional force to royal hegemony. The success of traditional ideology has been predicated on the way in which extra-economic coercion has been presented as being in the very nature of things – it is the "Swazi way". Forced labour, forced contributions and forced removals are the major constituents of the regime of extra-economic coercion in Swaziland. In so far as these practices are essential in maintaining the powers of the monarchy over the land, they are important components of capital accumulation in Swaziland. At the same time, it has been argued that they "preclude the development of a democratic political culture in Swaziland." (Levin; 1991)

Lastly, the study shows that Swazi workers do not see themselves as workers in the broader sense since they did not undergo a complete proletarianization process. This suggests that there are only certain issues that these workers would be prepared to struggle for inside and outside the workplace. On the other hand, as long as both civil society and the trade union movement do not increase the space for the participation of people in the national political life of the country then the prospects are slim. As a

precondition this would call for narrowing the gap between political issues and socio-economic issues. Therefore, this research holds that it is not a given that a relocation of capital translates into the emergence of a countermovement. Whilst this theory is not necessarily incorrect, other factors also determine if this will occur, hence it is a theory that cannot be generalized.

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