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Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970-1979.

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2007

Declaration

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

Nicole Ulrich

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1 day of August 2007

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers Union
AMWU	African Mine Workers Union
ANC	African National Congress
ATWIU	African Textile Workers Industrial Union
AULCDW	African Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers
BAWU	Black Allied Workers Union
BCAWU	Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CCAWUSA	Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers of South Africa
CCOBTU	Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions
CGWU	Chemical and General Workers Union
CIWW	Council of Industrial Workers on the Witwatersrand
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
EAWU	Engineering Allied Workers Union
EPSF&AWU	Eastern Province Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FTWU	Furniture and Timber Workers Union
FNETU	Federation of Non-European Trade Unions
FOFATUSA	Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund
GAWU	Glass and Allied Workers Union
GWU	Garment Workers Union
IAS	Industrial Aid Society
ICFTU	International Confederation of South African Labour
ICU	Industrial Commercial Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IWA	Industrial Workers of Africa
LRA	Bantu Labour Relations Act
NUCW	National Union of Clothing Workers
NUSAS	National Unions of South African Students
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
MAWU	Metal Allied and Workers Union
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NULCDW	National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa
PWAWU	Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union

SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SACWU	South African Chemical Workers Union
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SASO	South African Student Organisation
SFAWU	Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union
T&LC	South African Trades and Labour Council
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TAWU	Transport and Allied Workers Union
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TUACC	Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee
TWIU	Textile Workers Industrial Union
UAW	Union of Automobile Workers
UDF	United Democratic Front
UTP	Urban Training Project
WPGWU	Western Province General Workers Union
WPWAB	Western Province Workers Advice Bureau
WPMAWU	Western Province Motor Assemblies Worker Union
YCW	Young Christian Workers

Abstract

With the rise of the new social movements and increasing number of protests over service delivery in South Africa's poorest townships, many activists have started to question whether unions are able to relate to the demands of the unorganised and poor. It is argued that under the new democracy COSATU has become bureaucratic and is too closely aligned to the ANC to challenge government policies and play a transformative role in society. Such concerns are not entirely new. Labour historians and industrial sociologists have long debated the political potential and democratic character of trade unions and there is a vast literature documenting the organisational styles of unions in South Africa today and in the past. Based on examination of union archival records and interviews with key informants, this study traces the emergence of the 'workers control' tradition in South African trade unions. 'Workers control' is a unique approach based on non-racial, industrial trade unions, which are democratically organised on the factory floor. Such unions, which are ideally controlled by elected worker representatives at all levels and united nationally on the basis of sharing common policies and resources, create the basis for an autonomous movement that promotes the interest of workers.

Although most closely associated with FOSATU (1979-1985), this study found that workers control had deeper historical roots. Workers control was a product of the ideological and organisational renewal that characterised the 1970s and was initially created by the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC) in Natal and, later, the Witwatersrand. TUACC, which included significant numbers of women employed as semi-skilled production workers and unskilled migrant men, reflected complex shifts in the labour market and the economy. It was in this context that ordinary union members together with a diverse layer of activists developed TUACC's unique approach to organisation. The power of white university trained activists in determining union policies has been overestimated and worker leaders, particularly more educated women workers, played an important role in building TUACC unions. Based on a Gramscian analysis, TUACC maintained that democratic unions based on strong shop floor organisation could exploit loop holes in the law and participate in industrial structures without undermining union autonomy and democracy. TUACC, however, was less clear of how to relate to political movements and parties. TUACC distanced itself officially from the banned ANC to avoid repression, but some workers and unionists looked to homeland and traditional leaders for alliances. This tension between the creation of a democratic trade union culture and the workers' support of more autocratic political and traditional leaders and populist movements was never resolved.

All of TUACC's affiliates were founder members of COSATU and this study gives us some insight into the traditions that inform COSATU's responses to social movements, political parties and the state today. Drawing on the insights of the Anracho-syndicalism, this study also highlights some of the dangers of separating the economic and political activities of workers into unions and political parties respectively.

Introduction

The Origins of 'Workers' Control'

Since its formation in 1979, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) has attracted much controversy. Shaped by what has become known as the 'workerist-populist' debate, this controversy is mostly driven by various interpretations of the federation's political agenda or lack thereof. This study originally aimed to contribute to this debate by investigating the political tenets of FOSATU and analysing the federation's policies and activities.

FOSATU's political position, however, cannot be understood in isolation and forms part of the federation's unique approach to trade union organisation. This approach, referred to as 'workers control', promoted non-racialism, industrial unionism, and a distinct form of direct democracy. For FOSATU, workers could only gain meaningful control over society if they created their own democratic organisations that were independent of non-working class political alliances and were placed under their own command. Democratic trade union organisation was based on building solid structures at the workplace- the point of production where workers have the most power and authority. It was also at the workplace that rank and file members, from different factory departments, elected representatives, who were given clear mandates and held accountable through regular report back meetings.[1] The control of workers was further entrenched by developing worker representatives into a layer of confident and capable worker leaders and creating structures that allowed these worker leaders to participate from a position of strength and dominate decision-making at all levels.[2] FOSATU also sought to unite organised workers into a 'tight' national structure. This meant that union affiliates, which organised on a national basis in strategic industries, agreed to share resources and develop policies jointly.

These organisational principles were designed to steer day-to-day struggles at the workplace as well as provide the federation with a broader political direction. FOSATU's understanding of the state centred on the notion that class determined the way in which

power operated in society and that political issues essentially revolved around the class struggle and the fight against capitalism. Drawing on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, the federation saw the apartheid state as a repressive instrument of domination and control that was located within a contradictory nexus of social relations and shaped by the balance of class forces.[3] Consequently, the federation maintained that workers could exploit the contradictions inherent in government reforms and use legal openings to their advantage if their organisations were strong, democratic and resisted measures that undermined their goals. FOSATU, therefore, challenged the argument made by the exiled South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) that it was impossible to build an effective non-racial trade union movement under apartheid.

This emphasis on the development of strong and democratic working class organisation that championed the interests of workers by focusing on the class struggle underpinned the federation's understanding of political action. The political position of the federation was articulated in the lecture delivered by the historian and labour activist Philip Bonner at the founding congress in which he raised concerns about previous trade union movements.[4] He criticised the Industrial Commercial Union (ICU) for failing to develop strong factory floor organisation and including all sorts of other classes (professionals, chiefs and businessmen). Consequently, Bonner argued, the union became dominated by professionals and their interests (such as fighting for the abolition of passes for suitably qualified Africans) and 'far from being a workers organisation the ICU turned itself into a populist movement, without the capacity for improving workers conditions…'.[5] Bonner made similar criticisms of SACTU. Barring the older established registered unions, he argued that most SACTU affiliates aimed to recruit as many workers as possible and not only neglected strategic industries, but also resorted to general unionism and failed to develop sound organisational structures. In addition, the particular way in which SACTU unions became involved in political issues led to the subordination of unions to 'their ANC masters' and diverted their energies away from factory organisation into political campaigns.

Bonner, however, noted that SACTU organised during a period of heightened political militancy and did not condemn the federation from taking up political issues. Rather, he maintained that:[6]

> Workers obviously have political interests, but these are best catered for by workers organisations. What they should not allow is to let themselves be controlled by non-worker political parties…or they will find their interests disregarded and their organisation and power gradually cut away.

FOSATU's position on the national liberation struggle and the workers movement was further elaborated in Joe Fosters' speech 'The Workers' Struggle - where does FOSATU stand?' delivered at the 1982 congress. While acknowledging the importance of popular struggles against national oppression, Foster drew on the experiences of other post-colonial African countries, pointing out that popular movements that were based on cross-class alliances focused on fighting illegitimate regimes. These movements did not necessarily confront capitalism and, once they came to power, often implemented measures that were not in the interests of workers.

Joe Foster explained:[7]

> All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive- most often colonial- regimes. But these movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problems of workers….it is, therefore essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters.

Referring to SACTU in the 1950s and early 1960s, Foster argued that in the past progressive trade unions were too small and weak to pose a sustained challenge to

capitalism and concentrated on the wider national liberation struggle, giving popular movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Congress alliance a workers' voice. By the early 1980s, however, factors such as the growth and concentration of a more educated and skilled working class in the factories and urban centres created favourable conditions for workers to build their own organisations in order to counter the growing power of capital and to protect and promote the interests of workers in society. FOSATU did not constitute the workers movement, but aimed to give 'leadership and direction' and provide an organisational base for workers by creating a strong working class identity and developing the necessary confidence and political presence for worker organisations. Once again, the federation broke with SACTU, which was strongly influenced by the South African Communist Party (SACP) that accepted the Soviet model of socialism, and Foster's speech confirmed a commitment to more democratic forms of socialism and the federation aimed to 'build a just and fair society controlled by workers.'[8] The actual composition of the workers' movement – whether or not it would include a worker party - and its exact relationship to the national liberation movement was not clarified and remained contentious.

Workers' control represented the emergence of a unique organisational tradition within South Africa that not only differed from the 'political unionism' of SACTU, but also contrasted with populist unions, which had weak structures and were dominated by a few charismatic leaders, as well as bureaucratic African unions, which focused on work place issues and were controlled by officials. Preliminary investigations revealed, however, that much of the workers' control tradition was already in place by the time FOSATU was formed. This raised an important question – how did this novel style of trade union organisation come into being? The attention of this study shifted to the 1970s, which denotes a period of organisational and ideological rejuvenation and the re-birth of trade unionism amongst African workers. A variety of different tendencies can be found in the 'emerging' trade union movement and this study argues that the workers' control tradition originated with the organisations and unions associated with the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC) in Natal and the old Transvaal. Consequently, TUACC, as opposed to FOSATU, became the central focus of this study.

Most of the key studies on the history of emerging unions fall within the old school of labour history and mainly investigate organisational structures, strikes, and leadership. It is within this context that debates around the new generation of white unionists, who were instrumental in the establishment of the new non-racial trade unions, have come to dominate the literature.[9] There are, however, studies that break this mould and examine the culture and consciousness of organised workers. These include David Hemson's study of the 1969 Durban dockworkers' strike and Aristides Sitas' study of metal workers on the East Rand in the early 1980s.[10] Sakhela Buhlungu's work straddles these concerns and while he remains concerned with white unionists and contributes a great deal to recent discussions on their role, his study of leadership and democracy in post-1973 trade unions highlights the role that the 'lived experiences' of workers played in shaping trade union traditions.[11]

This study does not provide a detailed social history of TUACC, but draws on the insights of these authors by arguing that while the major role of trade union leaders should not be minimised, it is important to consider the ways in which the working class members of TUACC contributed to the creation of the workers' control tradition. The membership composition of TUACC affiliates proves particularly salient in this regard. One of the key contributions made by Hemson and Sitas is that they highlight the prominent role that migrants played in revival of trade unions during the 1970s. A similar membership trend can be seen in TUACC more generally where male migrants constituted a significant proportion of union membership. Sitas also draws our attention to women workers by noting that the first urban-based workers to join the Metal Allied Workers Union (MAWU) on the East Rand were African women. The large numbers of African women (*both migrant and urban-based*) in TUACC- who had only recently been employed in the manufacturing industry (particularly in textiles) in unprecedented numbers as semi-skilled production workers- should also be taken into account. By examining the membership of TUACC it becomes evident that the merging unions were not simply a reflection of the growing presence and bargaining power of African semi-skilled production workers in industry, but represented the organisational and ideological

responses of the African working class to complex shifts taking place in the economy and labour market.

The character of TUACC's members- their level of skill and education, access to urban rights, and connections to the countryside- established organisational parameters that not only impacted on trade union structures and leadership, but also influenced the political positions adopted by the organisation. Although the transformative role of trade unions remains a key concern in South African labour studies, the political culture of organised workers has been conceptualised in narrow terms. This is largely due to the influence of Marxism and the difficulty scholars have with understanding migrants, who have not been fully proletarianised, as progressive agents of change.[12] In addition, many scholars accept that trade unions can only be truly political if they are aligned to social movements or political parties and tend to characterise the emerging unions as economistic. This study, however, draws on an Anarcho-Syndicalist paradigm, which offers a broader definition of the working class that does not necessarily have an urban bias and maintains that trade unions can and do collapse the political and economic struggles of workers. It should be stressed that this study does *not* argue that TUACC or FOSATU were Syndicalist, but rather draws on the additional tools provided by Syndicalism to analyse the political dynamics within TUACC.

The organisational strategies and policies adopted by TUACC unions shifted over time and the formation of the workers' control tradition was determined by the day-to-day realities of workers as well as a range of objective and subjective conditions. It is within this context that two key arguments are examined. Firstly, this study questions the notion that connections with past traditions of resistance were totally severed during the nadir of African unionism in the second half of the 1960s. Even though the TUACC included large numbers of workers that were not previously schooled in trade unionism, workers relied a great deal on their past political and industrial experiences. Buhlungu argues that migrants drew on their experiences of participating in traditional political structures (*imbizo* and *lekgotla*), while Hemson highlights the profoundly democratic traditions of resistance that were developed by migrants at their workplaces. The interplay between

traditional or populist political cultures on the one hand and the entrenchment of a democratic workplace culture under TUACC, on the other, is of particular interest and it is within this context that TUACC's alliance with KwaZulu homeland officials needs to be examined. Secondly, this study seeks to add to the debates on trade union leadership and maintains that not enough attention has been accorded to the union leaders who emerged from ranks of the working class.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 reviews the literature on the emerging unions and explores the debates and theories that have informed the literature. Many of the scholars of the emerging unions were connected to the union movement in some way and their approaches shed light on the ideologies that shaped union organisation. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that we need to move beyond these debates and investigate the culture and consciousness of the rank and file to gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors that gave rise to the workers' control tradition under TUACC. **Chapter 2** discusses the methodologies that were utilised by this study and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of oral testimony as well as the archival documents that were consulted.

In **Chapter 3** it is argued that the union movement in Natal did not emerge in a vacuum and the factors that gave rise to and shaped the development of the new unions in Natal are considered. Emphasis is placed on the complex ways in which the boom and bust in the urban economy, the steady decline of the rural subsistence economy, and the regulations designed to control and regulate African workers created conditions that encouraged particularly migrant and female workers to mobilise and organise in the early 1970s. Attention is also given to the way in which the legacy of past union movements and the re-emergence of political and industrial resistance in the province during the late 1960s shaped the new movement. **Chapter 4** traces the early emergence of the workers movement with the formation of the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) and the 1973 strike wave that gave rise to the first new unions (the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and MAWU). This chapter suggests that the workers' control tradition took root at this time and the early organisational forms, policies and strategies

that were adopted by the new unions are considered. Special attention is given to the role of migrants and female textile workers, the nature of working class resistance and organisation, and the rise and of worker leaders.

Chapter 5 examines the consolidation and advancement of the workers' control tradition under TUACC and the various obstacles hampered the creation and growth of non-racial, democratic, industrial unions. These consist of the economic downturn; hostility from employers and the widespread victimisation of unionists; state repression and harassment; the negative perceptions of unions amongst workers; divisions among workers on the shop floor and the failure of strategic alliances. Internal organisational weaknesses- particularly the difficulties associated with the development of a solid layer of worker leaders- are also perused. This chapter maintains that the TUACC and the open unions responded to these challenges by refining their organisational practices and strategies. TUACC's expansion in the Transvaal and the development of national unions are two of the themes investigated in **Chapter 6**. Responses to the 1976 student uprising are discussed and this chapter contends that as the open unions started to recover from 1977 onwards, unionists paid increasing attention to the development of tactics that would enhance in-depth workplace organisation and rank and file participation. **Chapter 7** looks at the political and trade union alliances that TUACC developed in the late 1970s. TUACC's responses to Inkatha's overtures and the move towards a policy of political independence as well as the unity talks that led to the formation of FOSATU are examined. Chapter 7 maintains that the close links between TUACC and the NUMARWOSA/ UAW and their joint submission the Wiehahn Commission laid the basis for the new federation's position on registration.

A Note on Terminology

Many scholars refer to the unions that emerged to the 1970s as the 'independent' trade unions. As Johann Maree has already pointed out, the meaning of the term has altered over time.[13] Coined in 1977 by the *South African Labour Bulletin,* 'independent' trade unions were contrasted to African parallels affiliated to the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and referred to unions that organised African workers and govern their

own affairs. According to Maree, the term soon shifted to include all unions that were perceived to be autonomous from employers and the state. By the early 1980s, the term had changed its meaning again and was used to refer to those unions that rejected alliances with political parties.

It is due to the loaded meaning of this term that scholars have adopted other terms such as the 'emerging trade unions', 'democratic trade unions', or even the 'post 1973 unions'.[14] These terms are not without difficulties. Firstly the term 'democratic trade unions' creates the impression that all the unions that organised African workers in the 1970s were democratic and it obscures the various forms of democracy that were adopted by unions at this time. On the other hand, the term 'post 1973' trade unions ignores those unions that organised African workers, but that were formed before the 1973 strikes and excludes unions aligned to the Urban Training Project (UTP).

This leaves the term 'emerging trade unions'. Although not perfect in that it negates the role of some of the older registered trade unions that assisted with the re-organisation of African workers in the 1970s, it is sufficiently neutral in other respects. The term does not imply any particular structure or policy (such as non-racism, political independence, or democracy) and is vague enough, at least in terms of timing, to capture most of the relevant unions. More importantly, it denotes the birth of a vibrant new workers movement that was marked by the establishment of new unions with a predominantly African membership.

Notes: Introduction

[1]J. Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle- where does FOSATU stand?' in J. Maree, *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984: ten years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1987, pp. 219- 238; see also the *South African Labour Bulletin*, 7 (8): July 1982: pp. 67-86.

[2] J. Foster, 'The Workers'', p. 231.

[3] See P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions Since Wiehahn,' in *South African Labour Bulletin* (hereafter *SALB),* 6 (8): 1981 and B. Fine, F. de Clerq, and D. Innes, 'Trade Unions and the State: the question of legality,' reprinted in J. Maree, *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984: ten years of the South African Labour Bulletin,* Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1987, pp. 191- 207.

[4] Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter HP): AH1999: C1.8.2. 'Lecture delivered to the Inaugural Congress of FOSATU: the history of labour organisation in South Africa,' (by Philip Bonner).

[5] HP: AH1999: C1.8.2. 'Lecture delivered' p. 2

[6] HP: AH1999: C1.8.2. 'Lecture delivered' p. 5

[7] J. Foster, 'The Workers'', p. 228.

[8] J. Foster, 'The Workers'', pp. 219.

[9] See S. Buhlungu, 'Rebels Without a Cause of their Own? The contradictory class location of white officials in black unions in South Africa, 1973-1994', *Current Sociology*, 54 (3): May 2006; J. Maree, 'Rebels with Causes: white officials in black unions in South Africa, 1973-94: a response to Sakhela Buhlungu', *Current Sociology*, 54 (3) May: 2006; S. Buhlungu, 'Whose Cause and Whose History? A Response to Maree', *Current Sociology*, 54 (3): May 2006; J. Maree, 'Similarities and Differences between Rebels With and Without a Cause', *Current Sociology*, 54 (3): May 2006.

[10] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dockworkers in Durban', PhD thesis: University of Warwick, 1979 and A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in the Metal Industry, 1960- 1980', PhD thesis: University of the Witwatersrand, 1983.

[11] M. S. Buhlungu 'Democracy and Modernisation in the Making of the South African Trade Union Movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973-2000', PhD thesis: University of the Witwatersrand, 2001.

[12] More recently Marxist scholars, most notably P. Alexander, have attempted to theorise the working class and migrants more systematically. See P. Alexander, 'Oscillating Migrants, 'Detribalised Families' and Militancy: Mozambicans on Witbank Collieries, 1918-1927', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (3): September 2001, pp. 505- 525; and P. Alexander 'Class Theory and Cheap Labour: a challenge from South Africa', unpublished paper presented at XVI World Congress of Sociology, Durban, South Africa, 2006.

[13] J. Maree, 'Introduction', in J. Maree, *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984: ten years of the South African Labour Bulletin,* Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1987, p. i.

[14] J. Maree, 'Introduction' p. ix; S. Buhlungu, 'Democracy and Modernisation,' coins the term 'post-1973 unions'.

Chapter 1:
Nationalism, Socialism and the Emerging Union Movement.

1.1. Introduction

This study owes much to the insights of other scholars who have previously investigated the emerging trade union movement. In this chapter the contributions of these authors will be reviewed. Special attention will be paid to what they have written about past movements (especially SACTU); democracy; leadership and the way in which the emerging unions approached political issues. The membership composition of the emerging unions, as well as what has been written about their organisational culture and consciousness, will also be considered. In so doing, this chapter will also review the theoretical frameworks through which the emerging unions have analysed and the key debates that feature in the literature.

1.2. Renewed Interest in Labour

The late 1960s and 1970s represented a period of ideological and organisational renewal both locally and abroad. While Europe and North America witnessed the emergence of the 'New Left', South African scholarship was radicalised and transformed. Starting with the emergence of the revisionist school, radical academics within South Africa increasingly replaced classical liberal ideas with more radical interpretations of South African society that recognised the centrality of class in determining social relations within society.[1]

According to Jon Lewis, who writes one of the only historiographies of South African labour history, this major ideological shift inspired a number of students and lecturers, especially from English medium universities, to focus their energies on organising black workers.[2] The worlds of white middle class intellectuals and black workers converged; while intellectuals made their skills available to new unions (particularly in the field of worker education), the emergence of a new workers movement stimulated a keen academic interest in labour and shaped the research agenda of labour studies.[3]

The 1970s witnessed a plethora of contemporary studies that examined a variety of themes – strikes; labour law and industrial relations; influx controls and migrant labour; economics; union tactics and strategies. Many of these were published in academic journals such as *Transformation* as well as more popular publications including *Work in Progress* and the *South African Labour Bulletin.* Eddie Webster explains that the founding editors of the *South African Labour Bulletin* deliberately set out to link the journal to the trade union movement.[4] Contributions were drawn from people who were active in or sympathetic to the unions and dealt with current developments and debates. Consequently, the journal provides an invaluable historical record of the emerging trade unions and the commentaries published in the 1970s will be treated as primary sources in this study.

Lewis notes that labour history was also revived and mirrored the concerns and maturation of the workers movement. In the 1970s, for instance, Lewis argues that his own work on industrial unions in the 1920s and Philip Bonner's work on the ICU, were mainly concerned with organisational issues and union structures.[5] By the 1980s the resurgence of widespread resistance in South African townships brought issues such as race and nationalism to the fore. This, he argues, is reflected in Helen Bradford's *A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924- 1930* that discusses the ambiguity of cultural symbols and highlights the dynamic way in which the organisation combined the nationalist and class interests of its members.[6]

In addition, both Lewis and Luli Callinicos claim that labour history had a strong popular dimension.[7] According Callinicos, 'history is a political weapon activists use to advance current organisational strategies' and unionists incorporated the histories of trade unions into the curricula of worker education and union newspapers. The *South African Labour Bulletin* published numerous historical overviews, including a special issue dedicated to the ICU, and in the early 1980s *FOSATU Worker News* carried a series of articles entitled 'The Making of South African Working Class' (written by Philip Bonner). [8] Such interest was not confined to the union movement and Callinicos notes that various groupings,

such as the History Workshop, the Labour History Group, and the Labour and Community Project, also produced popular labour histories.[9]

The link between the labour movement and labour studies was further entrenched by the relationship that scholars of the emerging unions had with unions. Most were connected to the union movement in some way. To illustrate- Philip Bonner, Ari Sitas, Eddie Webster, Johan Maree, Steven Friedman, Rob Lambert, David Lewis, and Sakhela Buhlungu have all written about the emerging unions and have either played an active role in organisations closely associated with the union movement or have held a position in a union at some point. These connections allow authors to draw on knowledge and material that is not in the official record, affording intimate insight into the emerging unions. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the accounts of the emerging unions are influenced by the experiences and views of the authors, who were often key participants in the heated debates that took place in union movement during the 1970s and the literature on the emerging unions is often polemical in tone and forms part of the ideological record of the trade union movement.

1.3. SACTU and the Emerging Unions

SACTU's relationship with the emerging unions is complex. On the one hand, many locally based SACTU unionists and members of the Congress Movement threw their weight behind the new workers' movement and played an instrumental role in building the new unions. SACTU unionists, for instance, were involved in the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (WPWAB) in the Western Cape, the General Factory Workers Benefit (GFWBF) in Durban and the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) in Johannesburg. There are even indications that SACTU members provided the new non-racial unions with limited financial support.[10] However, the official SACTU, which was reconstituted in exile, was much more circumspect. The exiled SACTU's view of the emerging unions was outlined by Ken Luckhardt and Brenda Wall in *Working for Freedom: black trade union development in South Africa throughout the 1970s,* one of the first overview of the emerging unions that was written to drum up support for the international anti-apartheid movement and to warn against the reforms proposed by P.W. Botha's regime.[11]

Luckhardt and Wall divide the emerging unions into six categories consisting of: the SACTU underground network; the 'mobilising' tendency of the TUACC; the 'legalistic' tendency of the UTP; the 'subordinate' tendency of African parallel unions; the 'nationalist' Black Consciousness aligned unions such as BAWU; and unaffiliated unions and organisations such as the WPWAB and the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU). Luckhardt and Wall are dismissive of the parallel unions, BAWU, and the UTP and their sympathies clearly lie with the new non-racial unions. They even try to establish connections between these unions and occasionally refer to the participation of underground SACTU members in these unions.[12] They write that while the repression of SACTU led to a nadir in African working class resistance, the new leaders of the 1970s were distinguished 'by their determination to carry on the traditions of the Congress Movement'.[13]

They go on to argue that trade unions can only enact progressive change if they are non-racial and aim to liberate workers from both their class and national oppression by taking up political issues. Although they argue that TUACC failed to take an open political stand, they maintain that TUACC unions implicitly challenged aspects of apartheid. They write:[14]

> It was these unions which had considerably more experience of strike action than any other grouping and responded most often to spontaneous strikes by African workers. While the strikes which were supported by them and led by them were not expressly political, in all cases they either challenged the existing wage control system, the 'Bantu labour relations' institutions or involved a demand for recognition of the independent trade unions of African workers…

These challenges, they suggest, did not go unnoticed and the TUACC unions were 'exposed to the most severe state repression' as a result.[15]

Luckhardt and Wall argue that the reforms proposed by the Wiehahn Commission forced the emerging unions to make a choice – they could either take up political issues, which would lead to more repression, or keep politics out of the unions and collaborate with the apartheid government. According to Denis MacShane, Martin Plaut and David Ward, who provide an overview of trade unions in the early 1980s in their book *Power: black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*, this understanding emanated from SACTU's characterisation of the apartheid state as fascist.[16]

As John Gaetsewe, General Secretary of SACTU, had observed:[17]

> In the day-to-day battles for higher wages, better working conditions and trade union rights, the organisation and consciousness of the workers has advanced…at the same time SACTU recognises that there are ultimately only two options open to legal African trade unions: either to advance, taking up political as well as economic questions, and eventually being crushed or driven underground; or for the leadership to become co-opted and the unions emasculated…

SACTU considered any worthwhile trade union activity within South Africa impossible and claimed that SACTU (in exile) and other Congress structures were the only legitimate representatives of South African workers. SACTU and, indeed the SACP, went on to claim that the new unions were undemocratic 'yellow unions' and all the trade unions in South Africa were branded agents of colonialism and the apartheid state.[18] Since the new unions did not align to the ANC or SACP, as SACTU had done, they were also accused of ignoring the political struggle of workers and national liberation and were labelled 'economistic' (an argument that would resurface during the workerist-populist debate in the 1980s).[19] SACTU and the SACP promoted these views in the internationally based anti-apartheid movement and the new unions found it difficult to gain international support. In 1974 and 1975, for instance, the Student Association at Ruskin College called on the College to uphold the Geneva Resolution and break ties with the IIE, described as 'a solely defensive economic unit', on the grounds that SACTU and the ANC were the only 'authentic' bodies that represented the oppressed people of South Africa.[20]

On the other hand, emerging unions embodied a critique of SACTU and much of the literature on the progressive trade union movement from the 1950s onwards is couched in an ongoing debate on the way in which trade unions relate to the apartheid state and political struggles, including nationalist parties and community groups. The emerging unions were not monolithic in their critique of SACTU. The more moderate UTP-Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU) linked unions were anti-communist; rejected SACTU's focus on political rights; and called for the institutionalisation of industrial conflict that would allow for the development of 'responsible' unions for black workers. On the other hand, BAWU, which did not have much of a presence throughout the 1970s, agreed that the unions should participate in the political struggles of black workers, but rejected the non-racialism of the Congress Movement.

The debate, however, centres on the disagreements between the SACTU and the new non-racial Marxist unions (associated with the WPWAB, TUACC and the IAS) and later FOSATU. A number of activists, including SACTU unionists who participated in the new union movement did not want the new trade unions to be used as a front to recruit to for Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).[21] Believing that the organisation of workers was not only possible under apartheid[22], but a necessary component of a strong opposition within the country, they did not want to expose the unions to repression before they were given a chance to consolidate.[23] There was also a distinct tendency within TUACC that rejected the authoritarian model of Soviet socialism (supported by the SACP) and which sought to build a democratic and independent workers' movement that was not subordinated to a nationalist movement during the national liberation struggle and that could fight for the rights of workers and socialism even after independence was achieved.[24]

The arguments made by this tendency became more pronounced towards the end of the 1970s and were articulated in Bonner's address at FOSATU's inauguration and Fosters' speech at FOSATU's 1982 Congress. As already noted, Bonner criticised SACTU for subordinating the interest of workers to the ANC; diverting the energies of unionists into

political campaigns and failing to set up sound industrially based union structures.[25] Similarly, Foster argued that the progressive unions under SACTU became part of the popular struggle against oppression, but did not provide a base for working class organisation and left capitalist relations within South Africa unchallenged.[26]

Similar concerns were reflected in the literature on the emerging unions. For instance, Steven Friedman's *Building Tomorrow Today,* which was published for a local audience in 1987, maintains that trade unions were subordinated to the Congress Movement under SACTU.[27] Friedman writes that: [28]

> [b]ecause the Congresses needed a mass worker movement, SACTU tried to become one before it was ready: it threw its meagre resources into a campaign to build numbers, not strength. Workers were signed on but not organised and unions were formed hastily without proper staff or a firm factory base…The new unions [that is in the 1950s and 1960s] were weak and inefficient.

Friedman concludes that, '[b]y weakening that organisation in the factories, the alliance with the Congresses also weakened worker's ability to become a political force outside of them.'[29] The main lesson to be learned from past movements such as SACTU was that unions should build a strong organisational base in the factories before taking up broader political battles. They needed to rely on their own strength and remain independent from controlling registered unions and unequal political alliances that prevented workers from setting their own priorities.[30]

Rob Lambert, however, promotes a more nuanced critique of the SACTU tradition by arguing that while SACTU may have been subordinated to nationalist interests, there were instances where affiliates used their alliance with the Congress Movement to bolster trade union organisation.[31] After the passage of the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, communists continued their activities and worked through other organisations, allowing communists to gain an ideological foothold in the Congress Movement.[32] It was in this context, Lambert argues, that Michael Harmel's notion of 'internal colonialism'

(an elaboration of the 'Black Republic Thesis') became influential.[33] According to Harmel, the relationship between white rulers and the black masses was primarily one of imperialism and it was necessary to prioritise the political struggle to ensure that the racial restrictions that prevented the free development of capitalism and the emergence of an African bourgeoisie were lifted. Capitalism unfettered by the vestiges of imperialism would allow for the development of an organised and conscious working class that could proceed to the second stage and take up the fight for socialism. There is some ambiguity surrounding the question over which class should lead the national liberation, but Harmel maintained that the national liberation should be based on a class alliance and the African petty bourgeoisie should not be offended or alienated.[34]

A large number of SACTU unionists agreed with Harmel's assessment, but Lambert argues that their interpretation and application of his theory varied a great deal. As a result, SACTU was uneven when it came to defining the relationship between the political and economic struggles of workers, giving rise to various regionally based approaches to trade union organisation.[35] According to Lambert, the strongest of these was 'political unionism', which took root in Natal, and was based on the development of democratic factory committees that utilised political campaigns not only to raise the political consciousness of workers, but also to mobilise and organise workers at their work places. In this region the alliance with Congress strengthened workplace organisation and gave the unions an opportunity shape the politics of the Congress Movement by calling for a worker-led national liberation struggle.

In the Transvaal, however, SACTU unions such as NULCDW and ALCDW failed to integrate the economic struggles of workers and the political campaigns of the Congress movement. Unions in this province, which were bureaucratic and focused on 'bread and butter' issues, were relatively weak and unionists feared that other Congress structures and political leaders would dominate the unions.[36] In the Western Cape the FCWU was the strongest SACTU affiliate. While local union branches championed the civic concerns of workers (housing, transport, health etc), the union left broader political struggles to the ANC.[37] The 'political unionism' in Natal failed to become hegemonic

within the broader Congress Movement and, due to the federation's close linkages with the ANC's newly formed armed-wing, SACTU was smashed by state repression in the 1960s.

A number of authors have attempted to defend SACTU. For instance, in her study of trade union organisation in Port Elizabeth, Janet Cherry refutes the arguments that SACTU did not represent a true trade union movement and that SACTU was dominated by 'populist' or petty bourgeoisie concerns.[38] She argues that due to the weakness of the trade union movement in PE during the post-war period, general working class politics centred on issues of reproduction, giving rise to a militant tradition of community politics.[39] Organisations such as the CPSA, and later the ANC, played an important part in directing these struggles. Leaders of there organisations were not petty-bourgeoisie, but were drawn from the working class and the Congress movement took on a working class character. Unlike SACTU in Natal, industrial organisation failed to take root in PE, but the general union established by SACTU served to mobilise workers into a broader working class movement by taking up concrete demands and participating in political campaigns.[40]

More recently, Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu argue that 'white supported initiatives' (the non-racial Marxist unions, including the WPWAB, IAS, TUACC) have received a disproportionate amount of attention in the historical accounts of the revival of the labour movement.[41] Sithole and Ndlovu attempt to rectify this bias by, firstly, highlighting the important role that SACTU (in exile) played in building the trade union movement in South Africa. They maintain that, in addition to persuading the international labour movement to support an anti-apartheid programme, SACTU leaders attempted to regroup and revive contacts within the country in an effort to resuscitate political unionism. When such efforts were hampered by a security clampdown in the mid 1970s, the 'SACTU underground shifted away from recruiting members and sending them to operate abroad' and operatives were encouraged to remain inside the country where they 'performed their duties as coordinators and organisers'.[42] Sithole and Ndlovu claim that by the second half of the 1970s, political unionism (along the lines of the SACTU tradition) resurfaced and

challenged the 'workerism' of the other emerging unions. By the end of the decade 'a sound foundation' for trade union unity and 'struggles to create a democratic trade union movement, rooted in political unionism and guided by the tenets of the Freedom Charter' had been laid.[43]

In the second instance, Sithole and Ndlovu question the role of the emerging unions. Echoing the older SACTU argument that the unions inside South Africa were 'yellow unions', they characterise the emerging unions- including the non-racial Marxist unions that would later form the core of FOSATU and COSATU- as reformist organisations that 'bordered on the reactionary'.[44]

There are many problems with Sithole and Ndlovu's arguments. Legassick argues that they have misrepresented evidence to discredit TUACC/FOSATU and exaggerate the importance of SACTU and he draws attention to a number of inaccuracies in their work.[45] For instance, Legassick notes that the political unions (community unions) to which Sithole and Ndlovu refer only emerge in 1980, and not the mid-1970s as they suggest, and the unity talks that led to the formation of FOSATU were initiated by NUMARWOSA, not TUCSA, and SACTU did not participate in these talks. Legassick also questions the role of underground operatives and argues that 'while some SACTU activists may have been involved in building democratic unions inside the country, the whole pressure exerted by SACTU officials in exile was not towards building trade unions, but to act as a signpost to MK'.[46] Even though Sithole and Ndlovu claim operatives were encouraged to remain inside the country towards the end of the decade, Legassick shows that SACTU still called on workers to leave the unions and join MK in the 1980s.

Finally, Sithole and Ndlovu tend to dismiss any views that deviate from their narrow understanding of the SACP's analysis of South Africa as incorrect and automatically reformist or economist. Consequently, the complex conversation that took place between the union movement and the Congress Movement in the 1970s and 1980s is simplified. Their approach prevents any systematic engagement with the alternative interpretations

of Marxism and national liberation that emerged with the new unions and the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s and the fierce debates that took place in the union movement are not entertained. In so doing, Sithole and Ndlovu also fail to give any serious attention to the key discussions in the literature and do not engage with the theoretical issues raised in those accounts written by scholars who are sympathetic to the non-racial Marxist emerging unions.

1.4. Trade Unions and Socialism

Even before the 1973 strike and the revival of the union, Friedman notes that young activists debated the political and social significance of unions.[47] It was in this context that Richard Hyman's *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism* provided a theoretical framework for scholars, specifically in the field of Industrial Sociology.[48] For more than a century socialists have been discussing the revolutionary character of trade unions and Hyman summarises the Marxist contributions to this debate. Many Marxists may reject Hyman's characterisation of these various schools of thought. Nevertheless, his work – which gauges the revolutionary potential of the British shop stewards' movement in the 1960s- proved influential and requires discussion.

Hyman divides Marxist understandings of trade unions into two main schools. These include the 'optimistic' view (represented in the early writings of Marx and Engels), which proposes that trade unions can pose a threat to the stability of capitalism, and the 'pessimists' (consisting of Lenin, Michels, and Trotsky) who insist that trade unions inhibit any overt challenge to capitalism and the development of a revolutionary consciousness.

Drawing on the example of the shop stewards' movement in Britain, Hyman is clearly more optimistic in his prognosis. He argues that trade unions must be evaluated within their historical contexts and challenges Lenin's argument that the capitalist system can absorb the economic assaults of trade unions and argues that it is necessary to take the margin available for employers to make concessions within a specific economic context and the level of aspiration and degree of organisation among workers into account.[49] A

situation of radical instability is created when economic malaise is coupled with the heightened organisation and expectations of workers and increasing pressure from trade unions.

Michels 'iron law of oligarchy', Hyman claims, is also not the inevitable outcome of trade union organisation.[50] No matter how bureaucratic or service orientated a trade union may become, leaders are judged on their ability to deliver. To be able to lead effectively, officials are constrained by the demands and expectations of the rank and file. Related to this, the rank and file may well be of the view that their unions ought to run democratically and foster a real commitment to democratic practice and worker participation. Finally, while Michels tends to focus on formal and national channels of decision-making, Hyman notes that there may be significant membership participation and control at other levels of the union such as the shop floor or workplace. Formal or national levels of organisation may be infected by these localised structures, giving members on the shop floor a tremendous sway over the policies and actions of the national union and leadership.

The incorporation of unions and their transformation into mechanisms of control and discipline, as theorised by Trotsky, is also not automatic.[51] Capitalists may well attempt to incorporate unions to neutralise the threat posed in times of economic crisis, but union officials may not be in a position to succumb. Once again, Hyman cites the British shop stewards' movement as a case in point, noting that union leaders were compelled to support the self-activity of the rank and file in the areas of collective bargaining and internal union government.[52] Union officials were faced with the choice of either supporting union militants or running the risk of loosing control over their membership entirely. This, Hyman maintains, had important outcomes- a veneer of legitimacy was added to the vigorous resistance of shop floor militants and the traditional restraining influence of union officialdom was undermined.

For Hyman the British experience revealed a number of countervailing tendencies to those outlined by Lenin, Michels and Trotsky. The essential insight of Marx and Engels

was that they argued that unions represent a reaction against exploitation and their economic demands cannot always be accommodated within the system. Moreover, unions raise issues of power and control at the workplace, which may form the basis of political demands. This is especially true of the employment relationship and managerial control, which serves as a 'persistent source of political conflict.'[53] Consequently Hyman concludes that '[p]ure-and-simple trade union activity *does* pose a substantial threat to the stability of the capitalist economy in some circumstances'.

Hyman, however, argues that this position should not be accepted without qualification and it is necessary to interrogate the relationship between the day-to day activity of trade unions and the consciousness of workers. In so doing, he poses the question- can workers move beyond a limited form of consciousness without the revolutionary party?

Hyman is critical of Lenin's rigid distinction between trade union and revolutionary (or Social Democratic) consciousness and Lenin's rejection of a 'middle ideology'. Quoting Hobsbawm, he maintains that trade union consciousness may give rise to a general discontent and vague aspirations for a socialist society and argues that Lenin's approach masks a continuum along which escalation is possible. Hyman, nonetheless, notes that in some of Lenin's writings there is an acknowledgement that the trade union struggles can heighten the consciousness of workers. For instance, Lenin argues:[54]

> Strikes, therefore, teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalist only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes "a school of war".

Lenin's debates with Rosa Luxemburg, Hyman suggests, were not about the generation of a revolutionary consciousness through economic struggles without the party, but revolved around the degree to which trade union struggles rendered workers susceptible to a revolutionary consciousness and the type of relationship that should be established

between the party and spontaneous trade union activity. These questions were central to Gramsci's work, which Hyman argues '…possessed certain close affinities with the theories developed contemporaneously by the ideologists of the British shop stewards' movement.'[55]

On the one hand, Gramsci holds a negative view of unions. He claims that trade unions are dominated by capital, which can be used to discipline workers, and are an integral part of capitalist society. In addition, trade unions are prone to bureaucratisation, which flows out of collective bargaining and the need to secure concrete gains through collective agreements. At the same time, Gramsci argues that trade unions were of great value in building working class unity and self-confidence and that industrial legality was a victory for the working class, which improved the material conditions of workers. This victory, however, was not an end in itself, but represented a compromise that had to be supported until the balance of forces were turned in favour of the working class.

For Gramsci the Italian Factory Councils and 'internal commissions' (which have been compared to the British shop stewards' committees) represented a new and revolutionary form of organisation. These representative and democratic structures were based in the factory or workplace and united workers as producers (as opposed to wage earners) posing a direct challenge to the power and control exercised by the capitalist. Gramsci writes that,'[t]he Factory Council is the negation of industrial legality. It tends at every moment to destroy it, for it necessarily leads the working class towards the conquest of industrial power, and indeed makes the working class the source of that power...'.[56] These councils were not merely instruments of class struggle, but would form part of a new society and take the place of the capitalists by assuming all the functions of management and administration.[57] Gramsci argues that it was necessary for trade unions and these factory-based organisations to relate to each other and while revolutionary Councils dissolved the bureaucratisation of the trade union, the capricious impulses of the Councils needed to be constrained by the discipline of the union.

According to British theorists of workers' control, democratic factory-based organisation would continually encroach on managerial power and control, making inroads within capitalism that would strengthen the position of the working class and reduce that of the capitalist class, leading to a situation of dual power.[58] This relates to Gramsci's theories of hegemony and the role of the revolutionary party. Gramsci argued that the modern state was complex and relied on violence, economic coercion and ideology (the common sense values within society) to maintain control. For Gramsci the success of a socialist revolution depended on the working class creating a culture of its own that contradicted the norms and values promoted by the bourgeoisie. The only way in which revolutionaries could undermine bourgeoisie hegemony was through adopting a 'war of position' or 'war of movement' when dealing with the state. In essence this meant that the power of the state could be contested and, depending on the balance of class forces, workers' organisations should either seek to make compromises and alliances to maintain the *status quo* and defend their rights or fight for advances.

Referring to the Italian Factory Councils, Gramsci argued that the revolutionary party should take on a leading ideological (as opposed to an organisational) role. The party should not dominate the spontaneous struggles of workers, but should become immersed within these struggles and relate to them in a dialectical manner. It is important to note, however, that after the decline of the Italian Councils, Gramsci placed more emphasis on the revolutionary party and went on to adopt more conventional Marxist-Leninist understanding of the party.[59] Drawing on Machiavelli's 'The Modern Prince', he argued that it was the party's role to develop organic intellectuals and create an alternative hegemony within capitalist society.

Hyman argues that the experience of Italian Factory Councils demonstrated that consciousness is volatile and takes on different forms in different historical settings. Revolutionaries, therefore, need to be sensitive to the context in which economic achievements either facilitate the formulation of more ambitious material demands, making inroads into capitalism and culminating in class confrontation, or allow for the cooptation and incorporation of working class organisations. He claims that an important

determinant is the manner in which reforms are achieved. Drawing on the theorists of the British shop stewards' movement, he argues that reforms should be based on the mobilisation of an independent power base. Even though Hyman recognises that the workers' perceptions of reforms is also a significant factor, he is reluctant to accept Gramsci's model of the party (as defined during the period of the Factory Councils) which he maintains is over-optimistic.

Hyman concludes that:[60]

> …the limits of trade union consciousness can vary markedly between different historical contexts and can shift radically with only a brief passage of time. Under specific objective conditions the educative potential of collective industrial action may be immense; in others, perhaps more typical circumstances the spontaneous development of workers consciousness may fail absolutely to transcend the confines of bourgeois ideology.

Since there is no general theory that relates the struggle for material reforms to the development of consciousness, the revolutionary potential of the British shop stewards' movement could not be predicted. Returning to Gramsci in a sense, Hyman maintains that the question would only be resolved through practical activity and experience and the 'praxis of struggle itself.'[61]

One of the key weaknesses of Hyman's essay is his treatment of the Anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Anarcho-syndicalism was one of the dominant organised traditions in Italy during the late 1910s and an understanding of this school of thought gives us some insight in the consciousness and combinations of the Italian working class at the time.[62] There have even been suggestions that Gramsci may have been influenced by the anarchists in the Turin movement in what has been referred to as his 'spontaneist' period.[63] This is true in as far as Gramsci maintains that the democratic combinations of workers based at the point of production are potentially revolutionary and that he

recognises the importance that the contestation of bourgeois ideas and every-day struggles have in shaping the consciousness of the working class.

Like many Marxists, Hyman maligns and caricatures Anarcho-syndicalists by maintaining that proponents of this form of socialism believe that the economic struggles of trade unions 'directly and exclusively' generate revolution and 'naturally and spontaneously lead to the overthrow of capitalism' and that Syndicalists ignore the role of the state in society.[64] Most Anarcho-syndicalists would reject these claims. [65] Although Anarcho-syndicalists argue that trade unions are strategically located at the point of production, the heart of capitalist society, they do not assume that all trade unions are automatically revolutionary. For a union to be revolutionary it must be based on direct democracy and decentralised structures, adhere to the anarchist idea and rely on direct action and the self-activity of the working class.

Anarcho-syndicalists go on to argue that revolutionary unions cannot ignore political structures, but differ significantly in their methods of political struggle by maintaining workers should rely on their own revolutionary combinations (which could take the form of councils or unions) to take up political demands. This relates to the way in which Anarcho-syndicalists view the modern state. According to Bakunin, the state is necessarily a coercive institution, but is also reliant on a 'State morality' to legitimise state rule. The state, therefore, will introduce censorship and expropriate control over education and popular instruction to ensure that all citizens are inspired in both deed and thought by the values and norms of the ruling class. [66]

For a socialist revolution to be successful it would be necessary to challenge this 'State morality' and Emma Goldman argues that even before a revolution can take place a fundamental 'transvaluation of values' is necessary to ensure that the underlying values and ideas of the old society are removed.[67] For Anarcho-syndicalists, however, this 'transvaluation of values' cannot take place as long as socialists participate in state structures. The state is an agency whereby a ruling minority (which may include but is not confined to capitalists) oppresses a majority and is fundamentally hierarchical in

nature. Using the Russian revolution as a model, Anarcho-syndicalists argue that if workers' do not contest the state in its current form, a new ruling minority with a new 'State morality' would emerge and the sense of justice, equality, love of liberty and human brotherhood created by a revolutionary working class would be sacrificed to the self-preserving interests of the state. The 'transvaluation of values', therefore, not only includes a rejection of the 'State morality', but also of the physical structures produced by capitalist society and the hierarchical and authoritarian institutions of the ruling class. The means of socialists must match their ends and the revolution must be massed based, acquire democratic morals and ideals, break with hierarchical and authoritarian methods of organisation and reject the 'authoritarian principle' of the state.[68]

Anarcho-syndicalists agree that unions must relate to the state, but argue that the use of political parties are the 'very weakest and the most hopeless form of the political struggle' and oppose participation within parliamentary structures.[69] They also stress that it is through direct action – mass protest, strikes, pickets, sabotage, etc.- that the working class makes the most enduring advances. One of the key difficulties is that Anarcho-syndicalists are deeply divided when it comes to the industrial relations arena (the signing of agreement and participating in collective bargaining) and reform. While some argue that industrial structures dominated by capital and industrial agreements should be boycotted and unions should rely on the direct action of members to win demands and rights, others adopt a position similar to that of the theorists of the British shop stewards' movement and Gramsci. They maintain that political and industrial reforms represent a victory for the working class and unions could enter into agreements, as long the direct action of members and the autonomy of working class organisations are not compromised. Anarcho-syndicalists maintain that the working class with their democratic organisations must lead the struggle for socialism and revolutionary intellectuals have to utilise their skills and knowledge to facilitate this. Rudolph Rocker, a leading Anarcho-syndicalist in the first half of the twentieth century, sums up these views: [70]

> The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic fighting organisations of the workers. It as the recognition of this

> which impelled the Anarcho- Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power. Their method is that of direct action in both the economic and the political struggles of the time. That is the only method which has been able to achieve anything at all in every decisive moment in history.

Few trade union intellectuals in the South African are familiar with the original writings of Anarcho-syndicalists and rely on Marxist characterisations as a guide. As a result Anarcho-syndicalism has become equated with a crude economism and is mostly used as a term of slander in the South African context. Even though there have been instances when the emerging unions such as FOSATU have been accused of promoting syndicalism, it is important to note that trade union intellectuals did not draw on Anarcho-syndicalist ideas. Any similarities that the emerging trade unions shared with Anarcho-syndicalism should rather be attributed to the influence of Gramsci's ideas. Intellectuals in TUACC were inspired by the British shop stewards' movement and drew on Gramscian understandings of the revolutionary potential of the democratic worker organisations based at the point of production; the immersion of revolutionary intellectuals in the organisations and struggles of the working class; the importance of working class struggles in shaping consciousness; and the tactic of gaining industrial legality and engaging critically with state reforms. These ideas were not only reflected in the registration debate that unfolded in the late 1970s, but also has resonance with the more recent strategies adopted by COSATU around radical reform and engaging in negotiations with government and business.

1.5. Democracy, Bureaucratisation and Leadership

The British shop stewards' movement inspired many unionists in South Africa during the 1970s and it is not surprising to find that these scholars adopt a more positive, or optimistic, evaluation of unions and are interested in the same issues that are discussed by Hyman. For instance, Johann Maree, who provides one of the most comprehensive examinations of the emerging unions to date, focuses on the organisational aspects of these unions and investigates democracy and the role of intellectuals. [71]

Maree rejects the cynicism of the 'iron law of oligarchy' and challenges Michels' predetermined trajectory of union development, arguing that the emerging unions started out as oligarchic organisations that became more democratic over time. Maree concedes that African workers of the 1970s were not 'intellectually and politically inept' and drew on past political and union experience, but argues that due to the relatively low levels of education amongst African workers, TUACC, WPWAB and CCOBTU were initially dominated by their founders.[72] Union leaders, however, all '…shared a common intention of building democratic trade unions ultimately situated in the hands of workers' and played a central role in building democratic unions. [73]

For instance, Maree writes that: [74]

> …in Britain the driving force behind the democratisation of the unions after the 1960s was the upsurge in worker action on the shop floor, workers in the independent unions did not play a comparable role in South Africa during the 1970s. The force behind the democratisation of the unions was the commitment of intellectuals and other leaders to democratic practices into the unions.

It was largely as a result of this commitment that the TUACC, WPWAB and the CCOBTU progressed through three main stages of democratisation, which overlapped in some cases.[75] These stages included: the creation of democratic structures in which the majorities of worker representatives were established at all levels of the unions and coordinating structures; the development of workers' capacities to take effective control of these structures; and the creation of a representative and an accountable leadership in the unions.

According to Maree, democratisation was uneven process and important differences emerged in the leadership styles adopted by the various union groupings. Fearful of white domination, the CCOBTU unions focused on the development of African leadership. These unions did not really address the domination of African officials over ordinary

members and failed to prioritise the development of worker representatives on the shop floor.[76] On the other hand, white intellectuals in TUACC and the WPWAB, who proved tremendously influential, nurtured working class leaders and intellectuals and encouraged them to take up positions of leadership.[77] Although white intellectuals remained influential, by the end of the decade black working class leaders were becoming a prominent and powerful force.

Friedman makes common arguments to Maree, but does not give much credit to the past organisational experience, skills, or know-how of workers. He writes that: [78]

> [b]ecause African workers had been powerless for so long, most have no experience of running their own organisations. Because they have been denied formal education, most have also lacked the skills to run these organisations or the knowledge of history, economics and politics which enabled leaders to make informed tactical discussions.

This understanding of African workers may explain Friedman's bias in documenting the experiences of trade union leaders, particularly when dealing with the formative period of the emerging unions. In common with Maree, he suggests that it was the student activists who originally defined the approaches of emerging unions. It was only once African workers gained the necessary skills and confidence that they became more influential.[79] Nevertheless, Friedman argues that on the whole the emerging unions were committed to 'democratic grassroots unionism' and differed from their predecessors because they deliberately sought to build structures that would ensure that workers took part in decisions. It was largely due to this commitment to building strong democratic trade unions that the emerging unions finally achieved permanence.

In his study, 'Democracy and Modernisation in the Making of the South African Trade Union Movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973- 2000', Sakhela Buhlungu also investigates bureaucratisation, democracy and the role of intellectuals. Like Maree, he challenges Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' and argues that while unions can become

more oligarchic over time, there are also instances where the old leadership is replaced and unions democratised. He opposes the 'sterile polarity of democracy versus oligarchy' and confirms that while democracy may have been pronounced in the emerging unions, and even romanticised, democracy coexisted with anti-democratic and oligarchic tendencies and practices. [80]

Buhlungu goes on to conceptualise 'the dilemma of leadership', which he defines as the tension between the need to have an elected and accountable leadership and the desire for a more skilled and efficient full-time leadership. [81] He concludes that trade unions should learn to manage this dilemma and balance the need for democracy and efficiency. This, he argues, can be achieved by encouraging membership participation in democratic processes, which will allow them to hold un-elected specialists accountable, and providing education that empowers elected leaders and preserves the collective memory of union traditions and struggle.

Buhlungu, however, criticises Friedman and Maree for ignoring the ways in which workers shaped the traditions of their unions and rejects the notion that trade union democracy was the creation of a select group of activists. Drawing on the work of Eric Hobsbawn and E.P Thompson, he maintains that trade union democracy owes its origins to a number of cultural, traditional, political, and intellectual sources and influences. [82] Buhlungu is sensitive to the ways in which African workers shaped their unions and contributed to the creation of new trade union traditions. He argues that the 'lived experiences' of black workers facilitated the development of a common sense approach to democracy. [83] These lived experiences consist of previous organisational experience, the traditional customs of African workers, and negative experiences of repression. Previous organisation experience includes participation in political movements and trade unions and Buhlungu maintains that many of the older workers who joined the new unions, especially in the Natal region, drew on the knowledge they gained from SACTU. [84] According to Buhlungu, workers' common sense approach to democracy was refined and articulated by a variety of intellectuals and both workers and their leaders

were responsible for the creation of a democratic culture that became part of trade union organisation.[85]

Buhlungu's study contributes to the growing recognition by labour scholars that it is important to consider the role that black workers and leaders played in shaping trade union structures and policies in the 1970s and 1980s. Deborah Bonnin and Mathew Ginsburg, for example, note that black working class intellectuals- many of whom were older and who drew on their previous union and political experience- played an important role in educating younger workers in the unions (usually through cultural forms such as poetry and theatre) and contested the ideas of more educated and middle-class unionists.[86] Buhlungu, however, does not always explore the complexities of workers' life experience and the contradictory impact that specific life experiences may have on trade union formation in much depth. For instance, he asserts that African union members drew on their experiences of traditional gatherings (*imbizo* or *lekgotla*), but does not explore how workers reconciled these patriarchal structures based on consensus decision making with more radical notions of direct democracy and accountability in the union.[87]

Buhlungu has subsequently turned his attention to interrogating the link between white unionists and the making of trade union democracy. While this focus fits into his broader argument that a range of different intellectuals contributed to the creation of democratic trade union practices, Buhlungu is mainly interested in unpacking non-racism in the broader national liberation struggle and assessing the 'contradictory location' of white unionists in trade unions that mainly organised black workers.[88]

Buhlungu contests Maree's understanding of the part played by white intellectuals and the positions of both authors have recently been outlined in a debate published in *Current Sociology*.[89] Both authors agree that white unionists, who were mostly middle class and university trained, played a positive role by brining much needed skills and resources into a fledging union movement and contributed to the creation of a democratic trade union tradition. It was also largely due to their privileged access to skills and resources that white unionists were able to occupy and even dominate strategic positions in the unions

for a time. This started to change in the early to mid 1980s when an assertive layer of black leaders emerged and replaced white unionists, who retreated into research and policy work outside of the union movement.

Buhlungu, however, argues that white unionists neither transcended their history and heritage, nor bridged the social, cultural, linguistic and spatial distance between themselves and black workers and unionists.[90] Even though white unionists were dependent on black unionists to access the world of black workers, white unionists misused their special status to undermine democratic practice and operated in a manner that entrenched unequal power relations. On the other hand, black unionists, who found themselves reliant on white unionists, became resentful of being confined to more menial tasks and they were also unable to overcome their mistrust of white officials. With heightened political resistance against apartheid in the 1980s a critical mass of assertive black leaders emerged and turned towards the union movement. These new leaders were independent with their own political ideas and challenged the power of white unionists.

Maree, on the other hand, maintains that in spite of racial and class difference, white unionists played a central role in developing the capacity of black unionists and workers - so much so that unions with white officials tended to be more democratic and effective than those without.[91] White unionists did not necessarily impose their leadership and gained much trust from black workers. There was a real sense of solidarity. Maree also takes issue with Buhlungu's notion that white officials were 'rebels without a cause of their own' and argues that white unionists aimed to build a democratic and powerful workers movement, fight for economic and social justice and secure their own long term future in a democratic non-racial society. Finally, he maintains that the withdrawal of white officials from black unions in the 1980s should be viewed as a consequence of a broader strategy of training and developing black workers to take over the running of the unions.

Both authors have made valuable contributions to the literature, but are unable to meet Buhlungu's initial objective of moving beyond the '…usual South African obsession with

apportioning blame and claiming credit when different racial groups are involved' and they open the door to arguments that attribute important ideological and organisational trends in the trade union movement to the racial characteristics of unionists.[92] In addition, their persistent focus on white unionists leave us with an incomplete picture, obscuring significant features of the emerging unions, and a number of myths remain intact. For instance, in the case of the 1970s Buhlungu focuses on black leaders in the UTP-CCOBTU unions and both authors tell us very little of the black workers and leaders in non-racial Marxist unions (those unions with white officials). Even Buhlungu suggest that '[i]n the early years of the movement before the emergence of a critical mass of young and organic intellectuals and assertive political leaders among the workers, the leadership of white officials seems to be unproblematic' and we are left with an impression that the black workers who spearheaded the revival of open industrial resistance in the country were at the mercy of powerful white officials and had no real bearing on the character of their own unions.[93]

1.6. Trade Unions, National Politics and Community Struggles

Even though Maree and Buhlungu, and to some extent Friedman, note that oligarchic tendencies existed alongside democratic practice, especially during the formative period of the 1970s, they agree that the emerging unions were at the forefront of creating a democratic trade union culture. By challenging the notion that trade unions are not automatically bureaucratic they suggest that trade unions are also not necessarily conservative in nature. Together with other labour scholars, they question pessimistic understandings of trade unions (as outlined by Hyman) as well as SACTU's claim that the emerging trade unions were economistic and reformist and comment on the broader social and political role played by the emerging unions.

Maree is one of the few authors to explore the TUACC's dealings with the KwaZulu government in detail. He maintains that due to the close proximity of the KwaZulu homeland to industrial centres such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg, the TUACC had to take a stance on the KwaZulu government and Inkatha.[94] At first the unions in Natal believed that an alliance with KwaZulu officials would provide the workers movement

with some protection from employer and state hostility. Later pressure from Inkatha compelled the TUACC to formulate a policy on alliances with non-working class nationalist movements and the TUACC called for the unions to remain independent of party influences. Maree, however, does not believe that the political significance of the emerging unions lay in the way in which they related to national liberation, socialism, or 'community' issues. Adopting a classical Marxist approach (as defined by Hyman) Maree argues that since the power of trade unions lie at the point of production, '…the most important political role that the independent unions thus played in the 1970s was to lay the foundations which could assist the eventual transformation of the social relations of production in the work place.'[95]

Friedman, on the other hand, maintains that it was the commitment to democratic organisation that rendered the unions political: [96]

> …everything the unions have done over the past few years has been 'political'…The union movement may well have done more to bring political change nearer than any other black organisation in the country's history, but it has done this mainly in its 'humdrum' factory battles rather than its political campaigns. The factory fight has done something which few black battles for rights have done before- it has given powerless people a chance to wield power for the first time in their lives.

For Friedman, democratic unions not only demonstrated that change was possible, but also gave black workers the opportunity to make decisions and the confidence to change their world. In so doing, the unions created a model for political action that was later replicated in communities.

Building on arguments made by Friedman and Maree, scholars have extended the discussion by systematically analysing and theorising the ways in which unions relate to the state and un-organised sections of the working class and poor. South African labour activists have looked to other African trade union movements, especially under

independent regimes, for guidance. In 1966 Elliot Berg and Jeffery Butler argued that African labour movements that were in alliance with nationalist parties were unable to pose a significant challenge to the state because they would either become totally subordinate to nationalist parties or responsive and pliable to party pressures.[97] In 1973 Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, who focused on the material position and consciousness of unionised workers in Africa, contributed to the discussion. They argued that unionised workers were a 'labour aristocracy' who were solely concerned with protecting their economic privilege at the expense of the urban and rural poor. [98]

Scholars such as Richard Jeffries, Adrian Peace and Richard Sandbrook, have challenged these 'pessimistic' interpretations.[99] According to these authors, the economic prosperity of unionised workers is not as marked as Arrighi and Saul suggest. In addition, unionised workers are connected to the urban and rural poor through social and familial relations and organised workers often support their poorer family members financially. In addition, Sandbrook and Jeffries note that African trade unions have taken up the wider social and political grievances of the working class, posing a significant challenge to the state in some cases. They point to the 1961 strike by unionised rail and harbour workers in Sekondi- Takoradi (Ghana) when workers raised broad grievances and gained the support of the unemployed and market women. Sandbrook and Jeffries argue that such strikes illustrate that workers are subject to a wide range of ideas and consciousnesses. While not explicitly socialist, this 'populism' transcends economism as trade unions represent the underprivileged and no longer accept the distribution of wealth and power in their societies. These 'populist' attitudes drew unionised workers and the broader urban and rural poor together and encouraged the development of new tactics such as the general strike.

Similar debates have recently surfaced in South Africa about the role of trade unions under the new democracy. Buhlungu, for instance, is optimistic about the role that COSATU can play and argues that unions can make strategic use of tripartite structures to strengthen their position and influence broader economic and social policy to the benefit of workers and the poor without becoming dominated by experts and eroding the

militant tradition of workers' control.[100] In the literature on the new community based 'social movements' in South Africa, however, scholars and activists have criticised COSATU for failing to provide un-organised sections of the working class and poor with institutional support.[101] They see COSATU's alliance with the ANC government and 'legalistic' approach to organisation as a sign of incorporation and growing bureaucratisation and it would appear that the more optimistic readings of the role of trade unions in society, which dominate labour studies in the 1980s and early 1990s, is gradually being challenged.

It was not only in places such as Ghana and Nigeria that trade unions reached beyond the economic realm and championed the cause of un-organised workers and the poor and Eddie Webster and Rob Lambert have drawn on the experience of militant labour movements that emerged in newly industrialised countries during the 1970s and 1980s to gain a better understanding of the historical role of South African trade unions. In an attempt to come to grips with these labour movements Peter Waterman and Ronaldo Munck pioneered new international labour studies and developed concepts such as 'political unionism' and 'social movement unionism'.[102] These concepts are quite loosely defined and in 1988 Munck observed that, '…trade unions in the Third World are increasingly reaching out to those sectors outside of the formal proletariat and developing a form of 'social movement unionism".[103] He went on to argue that these unions were either approached by or turned towards new social movements, such as religions, neighbourhood, and women's organisations, and there were even unions that took up political demands. Social movement unions represented, '…a growing confluence of interests and a gradual overcoming of previous social and political barriers.'[104]

Others have refined this definition. Gay Seidman, who compares trade unions in South Africa and Brazil in the 1980s, distinguishes between political unionism, which refers to trade unions that operate within the existing political and economic framework and support political parties, and social movement unions, that have a constituency beyond the factory and take up broad issues around social and economic change.[105] Social movement unions link trade union and community struggles and challenge the state as

well as individual employers.

These concepts of political and social movement unionism have attracted some criticism. There are numerous historical examples – including in industrialised Western countries and 'socialists' countries – where unions have taken on social roles and aligned with political parties and movements. Thus, social movement unions should not be conceived as a new, or even unusual, phenomenon confined to the 'Third World'. Notions of political and social movement unionism only indicate that unions relate to other movements and sections of society, but do not shed light on the nature of these relationships (Are alliances formal or informal? Do organisations make joint decisions around campaigns? Which organisations lead the alliance?). Related to this, there is an assumption that political and social movement unions are necessarily progressive in character. This is problematic in South African where unions have mobilised beyond the factory for conservative aims, such as the protection of racial privilege.

Lambert and Webster's use of the concept, however, is quite well armed against these critiques. Firstly, they assert that political and social movement unionism is a distinct union tradition that emerges with SACTU in the 1950s. Secondly, they argue that political unionism is based on a *structured* alliance with political parties and social movements. In his doctoral thesis, Lambert insists that these social movements should be *urban* based and that alliances should be formed with the aim of challenging the existing structures of capitalist dominance through collective action. [106]

Furthermore, they distinguish political/ social movement from other types of unions. Firstly, they maintain that political/ social movement unionism differs from 'orthodox' unions, which are integrated into industrial relations system and view collective bargaining as a key priority. Orthodox unions concentrate on wages and the workplace and ignore issues related to reproduction, communities, and state power. In the second instance, political/ social movement unions should also be differentiated from 'populist unionism', which take up broader political and community concerns but neglect shop floor and industrial organisation.

For Lambert the political/ social movement unionism proved a powerful analytical tool as no other tradition is able to accommodate a configuration whereby African unions take a lead in the national liberation struggle.[107] This he asserts is true of Leninism, which subordinates the union to the party; Social Democracy, which subordinates the union to the bourgeois state; and syndicalism, which constrains the role of trade unions by failing to confront issues of state power. Political unionism, however, provides for the combination of the economic and national struggles of workers through trade union alliances with nationalist parties and urban-based social movements. Such alliances do not necessarily lead to the subordination of African unions, but give workers the opportunity to influence national liberation movements by placing the workers' struggle for socialism on the political agenda. Due to Lambert's understanding of syndicalism, however, he obscures a possible option whereby unions take up the political interests of their members and fight for national liberation without aligning to a political party.

Lambert and Webster also make allowances for a more loosely defined form of social movement unionism. They argue that the emerging unions were social movement unions in that they resembled the working class movement in nineteenth century England, which was first and foremost a 'human rights movement'. This movement had not yet been absorbed into an industrial relations system and the separation between economic and political struggles had not been institutionalised.[108] If applied consistently to the South African case, all unions that organised African workers before 1979, when the Wiehahn Commission recommended the registration of African unions, challenged racial capitalism and would have to be characterised as social movement unions. The general criticisms of the political and social movement union model apply in this instance. While there is a broad acknowledgement that unions take up political and social issues in certain historical contexts, the nature of these more loosely defined social movement unions (structure and ideology) remain vague.

David Lewis, who introduces a number of primary sources reprinted in G. Karis and M. Gerhart's *From Protest to Challenge (Volume 5)* has started to interrogate the nature of

the relationships established between the emerging unions and communities in more depth and adopts a refreshing approach to union and community relations.[109] He points out that there were a number of highly successful examples of union and community cooperation in the late 1970s and draws attention to the pasta boycott led by the FCWU and the red meat boycott led by the Western Province General Workers Union (WPGWU- previously the WPWAB). Focusing on the 1976 uprising, which involved clashes between migrant workers and township youth in Soweto, he argues that such relations were not always smooth and were limited by divisions within the African working class. He writes:[110]

> …continuing tensions highlighted a problem that has dogged community organisations to the present, namely the tendency of these organisations to focus on permanent township residents often to the exclusion of the migrants living in the hostel complexes and those in the squatter camps. One effect of this was to exclude a large proportion of the working class from township political organisation and to increase some of the difficulties in forging links between the unions and community organisations.

Lewis highlights the complexities of union-community relations and points out that even though the African working class shared the experience of national oppression, workers were not automatically united nor did they share the same immediate concerns. In so doing, Lewis provides us with a framework in which to explore the various ways in which notions of 'community' may have been conceptualised by different layers of the working class and encourages a more nuanced analysis of the issues that the emerging unions, especially with a large migrant base, prioritised.

1.7. The Marxist Unions and the Urban Training Project

Another key concern in the literature is the argument that undue attention has been given to the non-racial Marxist emerging unions. In his book *20 Years in the Labour Movement*: *the Urban Training Project and change in South Africa,* Donovan Lowry claims that the UTP had been marginalized from history and its leading role had not

received the acknowledgement it deserves.[111] Preoccupied with the need to demonstrate the ways in which the UTP established precedents for the other emerging unions, Lowry argues that it was the UTP that first rejected the political unionism of SACTU and encouraged a focus on 'bread and butter' issues in order to build strong and democratic union structures and avoid state repression.[112] This 'economism' was part of the UTP's overall strategy of institutionalising industrial conflict, which Lowry claims has since become hegemonic.

Buhlungu has criticised Lowry for being too conspiratorial and for failing to examine the factors, apart from competition from the non-racial Marxist unions, which facilitated the UTP's marginalisation.[113] Much like the other scholars of the emerging unions, Lowry also does not pay much attention to the rank and file of the UTP unions. This is unfortunate as there are indications that the UTP unions mainly organised semi-skilled urban-based workers and formed part of a more 'respectable' trade union culture on the Witwatersrand (see Chapter 6 for more details). Even though he mentions the important role of the churches in supporting the UTP unions and the influence of Black Consciousness ideas on union leaders, there is little discussion on what impact this may have had on the consciousness of ordinary members. Lowry also does not address Maree's claims that there were important regional differences in the UTP unions and fails to recognise the role that the more militant (and presumably more migrant) East Rand sections had in calling for the democratisation of the unions and drawing sections of the UTP unions into FOSATU. Finally, Lowry's discussion on the various approaches adopted by the emerging unions is superficial and he does not examine the way in which the Marxist unions viewed the state, which informed their engagement with the industrial relations system and reform, and how these views may have differed from the UTP's economism.

As noted above, Sithole and Ndlovu make similar claims and argue that 'student supported initiatives' (WPWAB, IAS and TUACC) have received more attention 'despite the fact that their performance in unionisation was far outshone by that of the UTP'.[114] These authors, however, do not consider how the UTP, an indeed the other emerging

unions, may have changed over time, nor do they define what they mean by the 'performance in unionisation'. For instance, while the UTP may have had more members in the mid 1970s, TUACC unions were based on in-depth factory organised and were stronger and more democratic. In addition, by the end of the decade the Marxist unions were overtaking the UTP- CCOBTU unions in terms of numbers – at its formation in April 1979 FOSATU (which did not include the WPWAB) claimed 45,000 members, while CUSA, formed in September 1980, only claimed between 20,000 to 30,000 members.[115]

Lowry, Sithole and Ndlovu, nevertheless, point to an important gap and more research on the UTP-CCOBTU unions will enhance our knowledge of workers' organisation in the 1970s. Scholars, however, should move beyond the polemics that dominate accounts of the emerging unions and consider the part played by the rank and file and the way in which different working class cultures may have influenced organisation and fed into the conflicts between the emerging unions.

1.8. Class, Culture, and Consciousness

Understanding the political role of trade unions and their contribution to socialism and national liberation remains important, but scholars also need to pay attention to the members of unions and analyse working class organisations on their own terms to gain a more in-depth understanding of labour in the 1970s and the factors that shaped the various approaches adopted by the emerging unions. Social historians, particularly E.P. Thompson, who recognises that even the most sophisticated sociological models are unable to capture the fluency and intricacies of historical processes, provide a framework for doing this.[116]

Although Thompson accepts the centrality of class and class struggle, he defies the essentialism and teleology associated with a crude Marxism based on historical materialism. He explores the subjective aspects of the working class experience and, rather than placing faith in historical laws, emphasises the agency of ordinary people in history. This is illustrated by his conception of class, which is not seen as a thing with a

predetermined and ideal consciousness, but a historical relationship that must be viewed '…as a social and cultural formation arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period.'[117] Thompson argues that, '…[t]he class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born- or enter into involuntarily ...' and many social historians recognise the importance of examining the social, economic and political context in which the working class finds itself and creates.

According to van der Linden, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, first published in 1963, was a landmark publication for social history and transformed labour history into working class history.[118] 'Old labour history'- with its institutional focus on the description of organisational developments, political debates, leaders and strikes- was replaced by a new approach to history that focused on the working class and sought to contextualise workers' struggles. Lewis argues that social history started to blossom within the South African academy in the early 1980s, stimulating an interest in new themes such as gender, working-class culture, community and consciousness, and class formation in the countryside.[119] Social historians not only asked new questions, but also deployed new methodologies and strongly encouraged the use of oral testimonies (this methodology will be discussed in Chapter 2). Social history gave rise to a number of innovative studies such as Elsabe Brink's 'Maar a' Klomp Factory Meide: Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand in the 1920s'; Dunbar Moodie's 'Mine Culture and Miners Identity on the South African Gold Mines'; and William Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism, and Nationalism: the experiences of a South African migrant, 1930- 1960'.[120]

Social history allows us to imagine unions in a new ways. When working from the perspective of the working class union members, for instance, entirely different meanings become attached to the social and political aspects of unions. By breaking from historical laws and ideal consciousnesses, we are able to consider the real life experiences of workers and how they shaped the subjective and structural aspects of their organisations. Lewis argues, however, that on the whole social history did not radically transform

labour history, which remained narrowly focused on institutions, leaders and strikes. In terms of the literature on trade unions in the 1970s and 1980s, however, there are a number of notable exceptions where authors have investigated the culture and consciousness of organised workers.[121] Of these, David Hemson's 'Class Consciousness and migrant Workers: Dockworkers in Durban' and Aristides Sitas' 'African Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in the Metal Industry, 1960 – 1980' are particularly useful in shedding light on the members of the TUACC unions and require discussion.

Hemson, who briefly touches on the 1970s, examines the dynamic consciousness and the traditions of workplace resistance that were adopted by African migrant dockworkers in Durban.[122] Scholars have considered the impact that migrants' urban experiences have had on social and political relations in the countryside. For instance, Peter Delius documents how Pedi migrants on the Witwatersrand used their burial societies to resist the introduction of Bantu Authorities in Sekhukhuneland.[123] One of the most significant outcomes of this struggle, which bridged the urban-rural divide, was that migrants challenged many of the undemocratic aspects of their traditional political systems and the chieftaincy. Hemson argues, however, that the working class actions of migrant workers at the workplace have largely been neglected and, as a result, little attention has been paid to development of a working class identity amongst migrants and their struggles in the cities.[124] The record shows, however, that migrants joined trade unions, took part in strikes, and became members of political parties and Hemson notes that dockworkers in Durban have a long history of workplace resistance.[125] With the rural subsistence economy in perpetual decline, migrants became increasingly dependent on wages. They focused their attention on workplace issues and fought for wage improvements (as opposed to more resources and schemes to improve rural production), which Hemson argues, was part of their general struggle to have their rights as proletarians acknowledged.[126]

Dockworkers established links with SACTU unionists in the 1950s and supported the three day stay-away in demand of a minimum wage of one Pound a day, but from the late

1940s migrant dockworkers had already started to develop clandestine networks to coordinate collective resistance in response to growing state repression and control and the mass dismissal of strikers and victimisation of 'undesirables' by employers. According to Hemson, this underground organisation reflected the advanced nature of dockworkers' resistance and was able to survive longer than more formal methods of trade union organisation that took root amongst other workers. It is interesting to note that migrant mineworkers adopted similar modes of organisation on the Witwatersrand in the 1940s and (as Dunbar Moodie demonstrates) migrant forms of self-organisation existed alongside, and sometimes fed into, trade union struggles. [127]

Both Hemson and Moodie draw attention to the egalitarian character of migrant organisation on the docks and in the mines and worker leaders, who were often elected, went to grate lengths to ensure that consensus was achieved amongst workers before any action was taken. Democracy was not absolute, however, and the most profound expressions of democracy and working class autonomy existed alongside an acceptance of more autocratic forms of leadership, particularly in the political sphere. Mindful of the influences of populist ideas, Hemson examines the ambivalent relationship that migrants had with traditional authorities and homeland leaders and highlights the contradictory role that *indunas* played in workplace organisation and resistance. He, for instance, documents instances in the 1960s and early 1970s where dockworkers drew on traditional political structures and leaders to rally workers and discipline supervisors that were considered to be too harsh or unsympathetic.[128]

In his doctoral thesis 'African Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in the Metal Industry, 1960 – 1980' Aristides Sitas considers the consciousness and changing organisational cultures of metal migrant workers.[129] Sitas notes that SACTU had made few inroads into the metal industry on the East Rand during the 1950s and 1960s and argues that African metal unions, most notably the Engineering Allied Workers Union (EAWU), were shaped by their dealings with registered unions in TUCSA.[130] Although the EAWU would reject the paternalistic attitudes of this federation and associate with the Johannesburg based UTP, the union's structures and practices mimicked those of the

registered metal unions- officials were divorced from the shop floor, while shop stewards functioned as 'contacts' and 'recruiters' for individual members of the union.'[131] Sitas argues that this type of trade unionism was challenged by MAWU in the 1970s.

Sitas refutes the '…common orthodoxy that a township based stable black labour force was at the heart of the upsurge of worker militancy in the 1970s'. [132] He notes that migrant workers were at the forefront of union organisation in South Africa and, like Hemson, is one of the few to analyse the relationship between the declining subsistence economy in the homelands and the rise of the new unions. Sitas attributes the growing militancy of migrants to increasing economic and social pressures, which plunged the established 'cultural formations' of migrants into a crisis. He maintains that MAWU provided workers with a much-needed sense of cohesion and the union's style of grass roots democracy gave migrants a greater sense of control over their own lives. Migrants replaced their long-established leadership, which consisted of a conservative layer of older migrants who were quickly loosing legitimacy, with leaders who were elected and accountable. Before long, migrant's social networks were reshaped to facilitate union organisation. The consciousness of union members is also examined and Sitas claims that a new discourse of struggle- described as a 'militant, populist workersim'- emerged. This discourse included national and racial metaphors together with romantic notions of the countryside intermeshed with Christianity. At the same time, the primacy of the working class struggle and the union was stressed. [133]

This study will draw on many of Sitas' insights. There are, however, aspects of his study that require reflection. Firstly, Sitas does not shed much light on the informal and hidden forms of workplace resistance that were adopted by migrant metal workers before they joined MAWU. Consequently, it is difficult to get a fix on the way in which the 'cultural formations' of migrant metal workers were transformed. Did MAWU represent and an entirely new method of organisation and the beginnings of working class resistance amongst migrant metal workers or did the union draw on and formalise existing modes of protest and mobilisation? Secondly, Sitas draws attention to the populist elements within migrant metal workers' culture and consciousness, but does not consider how the more

autocratic elements within migrant culture and homeland politics may have shaped the union.

Finally, Sitas points out that the fist urban workers to join new unions such as MAWU were African women. He, however, does not explore gender in any depth, which is unfortunate since women seemed to occupy many key positions in the emerging unions, including MAWU. The prominence of women seems out of the ordinary and the way in which migrants, who Delius claims were not used to dealing with women in their own organisations, related to female worker leaders needs further attention.[134] In her study, *Threads of Solidarity: women in South African industry, 1900 – 1980*, Iris Berger argues that South African labour history has been too narrowly conceived to deal with gender. She attempts to rectify this by examining the particular contributions made by women workers and trade unionists.[135] As in the case of Sitas, however, Berger does not throw that much light on gender relations within the emerging unions and she does not consider the impact that gendered identities may have had on trade union organisation.

1.9. Conclusions

Accounts of the emerging unions are mostly written by activists who participated in the workers' movement and the literature is framed by a number of key debates, which emanate from contemporary discussions that took place within the unions. These debates have mostly focused on the way in which the unions were organised; how they perceived and related to the state, and their approach to national politics and community-based struggles.

The relationship between SACTU in exile and the emerging unions features prominently and still shapes the way in which scholars have characterised the emerging unions. Even though SACTU veterans participated in non-racial Marxist unions, activists in these unions maintain that SACTU failed to build effective industrial structures, subordinated the interests of the unions to nationalist parties, and did not give rise to an effective and well organised working class movement that was able to challenge capital. On the other hand official SACTU unionists and leaders of the SACP maintained that the emerging

unions, including TUACC, were undemocratic, economistic and reformist organisations that failed to challenge the apartheid state. In spite of evidence to the contrary, Sithole and Ndlovu have resuscitated some of these old SACTU arguments and contribute to an official narrative that places the ANC exile movement and the armed struggle at the centre of the struggle against apartheid.[136]

Sithole and Ndlovu recount the positions of SACTU and the SACP, but do not appear to understand the ideas that influenced unionists in the 1970s and which inform many of the scholarly accounts of the emerging unions, especially on the on-racial Marxist orientated WPWAB, IAS and TUACC. These authors are particularly concerned with Marxist debates on the revolutionary potential of trade unions and, like Hyman, argue that trade unions are not necessarily bureaucratic or conservative in nature. Scholars such as Maree, Friedman and Buhlungu have concentrated on the organisational aspects of unions and examine democracy and leadership, particularly the role of white unionists, in the emerging unions. Even though these scholars note that there were oligarchic tendencies in the emerging unions, they reject the notion that trade unions will automatically become more bureaucratic over time and maintain that the emerging unions played an important role in challenging capital and apartheid. Webster and Lambert have extended this discussion by looking at the way in which unions relate to political organisations and other social and community based movements. They argue that the emerging unions were never economistic and not only championed worker and trade union rights, but were also involved in wider issues relating to reproduction (such as housing and pensions).

The literature has been dominated by theoretical debates and little attention has been given to the working class members of trade unions. This is also true of Lowry's account of the UTP. There are, however, notable exceptions. Lewis, for instance, has questioned the urban bias in the literature and points to the complexities that inform the relations between urban communities and unions with migrant members. He demonstrates that by taking divisions within the African working class into consideration account, a whole range of events – such as relations with the KwaZulu government, the 1976 uprising, struggles and strikes over union rights for migrants, and registration- take on an entirely

different meaning. In addition, scholars such as Hemson and Sitas have broken away from ‘old labour history’ and investigate the culture and consciousness of dockworkers and metal workers respectively. They elucidate the prominence of unskilled migrant workers in the workers’ movement during the 1970s and highlight the ways in which workers were able to shape their own organisations and forms of resistance. By taking the agency of union members into account, our understanding of the impact of past organisations, trade union democracy, political policy, and union relations with communities starts to shift.

Notes: Chapter 1

[1] For a more detailed discussion on the rise of the revisionist school in South Africa see B. Bozzoli and P. Delius. 'Radical History and South African Society', *Radical History Review,* 46 (7): Winter 1990: pp.13- 45.

[2] J. Lewis, 'South African Labour History: a historical assessment.' *Radical History Review*, 46 (7): Winter 1990: pp. 213-235

[3] J. Lewis, 'South African Labour', pp. 217-8.

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[6] See H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924- 1930*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1988. See also J. Lewis, 'South African Labour', p. 227 for discussion on Bradford's work.

[7] For a discussion on popular history see L. Callinicos, 'Popular History in the Eighties.' *Radical History Review*, 46 (7): Winter, 1990: pp. 285- 297

[8] See *SALB*, 1 (6 & 7): September 1974. Other examples include: IIE *The Durban Strikes 1973: 'Human Begins with Souls*, Durban, in association with Ravan Press, 1974; A.T. Qabula, *A Working Life Cruel Beyond Belief*, Pinetown, NUMSA, 1989; CWIU *The Struggle for Workers Rights: a History of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union*, Durban, CWIU, 1994.

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Callinicos, *Working Life: Factories, Townships and Popular Culture*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987; Labour History Group: *The ICU, 1922 White Mineworkers Strike, Workers at War, CNETU and the 1946 African Mineworkers Strike, Garment Workers Union, Organising the Cape Town Docks, and Asinamali, Organising in the 1950s;* Labour and Community Project *Freedom from Below: the Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa*, 1989.

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[15] K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Working For Freedom*, p. 35.

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[18] See for instance 'Direct Links' Stinks', originally published in *Workers' Unity: organ of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*. Issue No. 38, April 1982.

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[21] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003 and Halton Cheadle, interviewed by NU, January 2007.

[22] Many unionists argued that while the South African government was authoritarian, it was not fascist. This meant that trade unionism was possible.

[23] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[24] See HP: AH1999: C1.8.2: 'Lecture delivered' and J. Foster, 'The Workers'.

[25] HP: AH1999: C1.8.2: 'Lecture delivered'.

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[29] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 33.

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[34] see Harmel and Bernstein in R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', p. 83

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[36] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', pp. 205- 208.

[37] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 255.

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[50] R. Hyman, *Marxism and*, p.32.

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[89] S. Buhlungu, 'Rebels Without'; J. Maree, 'Rebels with Causes', S. Buhlungu, 'Whose Cause and Whose History? A Response to Maree'; J. Maree, 'Similarities and Differences'.

[90] S. Buhlungu, 'Rebels Without', p. 435- 455.

[91] J. Maree, 'Rebels with Causes', pp. 457– 465.

[92] S. Buhlungu, 'Rebels Without', p. 429.

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[94] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 348.

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[112] D. Lowry, *20 Years*, p. 11.

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[114] J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival', p. 241.

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Chapter 2:
Telling the Story: theory and methodology.

2.1. Introduction

Scholars of the emerging unions have deployed a wide range of methodologies, but the most common evidentiary sources used include documentary material, particularly the archives of the emerging unions, and oral testimony. This study also rests on an examination of these historical sources, which raise interesting challenges for researchers.

2.2. Oral Testimony

According to Paul la Hausse, the revival of African unions in the 1970s encouraged historians to move beyond political economy and explore issues related to class formation and the culture, consciousness and forms of self-organisation in the black working class.[1] This led to the emergence of a new 'history from below' that drew on social historians such as E.P Thompson, Eric Hobsbawn, Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman. Historians in this school recognised the enormous potential that oral sources offered in terms of uncovering the experiences of the working class first hand, which had either been excluded from the record or mediated through the writings of others. Oral history, which had previously been used to recover the histories of African communities and polities within Southern Africa during the pre-colonial and colo nial period, was extended to investigate new themes relating to popular experiences of change in the twentieth century.

For much of the 1970s and 1980s social historians used oral history to construct important biographical works; elucidate the nature of social relations and processes of impoverishment and dispossession in urban centres and the countryside; investigate the construction of identities and cultures (with migrants often as a key focus); explore resistance and informal and formal modes of orga nisation and networking; and uncover the experience of working life, including the role of women, generation and changing forms of family life, and the various life and survival strategies adopted by workers.[2]

Urban social history also stimulated an interest in local histories, the movement of people (urbanisation and immigration) and urban settlement.[3]

More recently the use of oral sources has extended into new areas that do not necessarily fall into the category of social history or 'history from below', but are nonetheless significant as they reflect more contemporary concerns of scholars in a post-apartheid context. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) public hearings, for instance, gave the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations under apartheid a voice and has brought the need to understand violence and trauma in South African society into sharp focus. There has also been a renewed interest in the hidden aspects of the national liberation struggle- such as stories of political imprisonment and underground political structures and networks. It should be noted that the TRC and many of the histories of political resistance, such as the volumes produced by the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) that has a strong oral history component, have been associated with the construction of an official national narrative and nation building. With the new democracy there has also been a marked interest in public history and the development of heritage sites and museums. Constitution Hill and Robben Island Museum have collected numerous testimonies on prison life and oral history has even been introduced into the school curriculum.[4] Finally, with the growing HIV-Aids epidemic, a literature that uses oral testimony to explore sexual socialisation, gender identities, popular understandings of disease and stigma is also in the making.

La Hausse notes that in the South African context oral history is seldom used in isolation and social historians combine oral sources with a range of archival material.[5] Social historians mainly access experiences of social change embedded within living memory and tend to focus on oral testimony, as opposed to oral tradition, and the collection of life histories interviews has become the preferred method.[6] Such interviews respect that a wide range of experiences shape individuals (as opposed to a specific event) and attempt to place the individual and dramatic events within a larger historical context.[7] Interviews are open-ended, allowing interviewees to digress and elaborate on issues that they believe are important. This, Delius argues, not only opens up new avenues of enquiry (which the

historian is often not aware of, but the explanations and interpretations given by informants also shape the historian's understanding and analysis of historical processes.[8]

La Hausse speculates that it is perhaps due to the reliance on a variety of sources that historians in South African have not engaged with the methodological implications of oral sources to the same extent as oral historians in the USA and Europe.[9] He maintains, nonetheless, that oral material is generally used carefully and critically and historians have paid close attention to the variability and fallibility of memory (including the tendency to be nostalgic and romanticise the past; the ways in which interviews are moulded by power relations and the social characteristics of the interviewee and researcher; and the ways in which language and translation influence the interview process). In those instances where archival material is scarce, great pains are taken to collect numerous testimonies, which are tested against each other with the aim of identifying clear patterns. Historians are also sensitive to being drawn into and relying on the evidence provided by one social network, which can be a danger of using the 'snow-balling' method, and aim to collect the testimonies from various sections of the community being studied.

Social historians have been criticised by scholars influenced by the French structuralism of Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas who rely on broad schematic explanations of society.[10] Mike Morris, for instance, argues that social history is anti-theoretical and anti-conceptual and fails to recognise the role played by 'primary' social forces and contradictions in structuring society.[11] There is an over-reliance on popular consciousness as a source of knowledge, which is problematic in that individuals are not able to understand the social forces shaping their lives, behaviours and consciousness in a clear manner.[12] He argues that social histories are fragmentary and are unable to comprehend society in totality or grapple with theoretical issues that explain larger social questions and transitions. This, Morris maintains, has important political implications in that social historians are prevented from contributing to a broader emancipatory political project.[13]

Keegan, however, maintains that structuralists have caricatured the theoretical framework and methodologies utilised by social historians.[14] Many social historians engage with macro-level conceptualisations, which they complement with more localised research. Keegan maintains that Morris has also confused the argument that oral history can yield useful historical data with the notion that subjective human experience is the only legitimate level of historical knowledge. In addition, Keegan points out that structuralists have not addressed questions around methodology sufficiently and do not question the documentary sources upon which they base their theoretical analysis.[15] As a result, scholars such as Morris ignore the complex processes of change and promote a model of functional and predictable outcomes that sideline human agency in favour of a 'view from above'. Oral history, however, enables historians to uncover the experiences of the voiceless – allowing historians to challenge hegemonic perception of the past and construct more nuanced understandings of change. [16] Finally, oral testimony can play a role in political mobilisation by restoring a sense of self-realisation and a common historical experience.[17]

On the other hand, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool criticise South African social historians for using the oral testimonies of individuals to construct a historical meta-narrative, giving rise to a 'domination and resistance model' of history.[18] This, they argue, is based on two compatible approaches- including the academic promotion of culturalist notions of class and consciousness as well as popular histories located within the cultural politics of nationalism- which access the past through classes, communities and organisations engaged in resistance that played out in a linear fashion with a clear origin, course and destination. [19] In summary, they argue that 'social history in South Africa brought together modernist appropriations of oral discourses with nationalist and culturalist teleologies of resistance to generate a grand narrative of experience, read as history from below.'[20] By failing to engage with the power relations embedded within conversational narratives, social historians undermine their radical and transformative intentions and 'impose themselves and their 'radical' methods on 'ordinary people' and 'inscribed them into an authenticated historical narrative'.[21]

Minkley and Rassool propose a framework that does not simply equate apartheid and resistance and recognises more subtle forms of economic, cultural and intellectual exchange integrally tied to the ways in which past and present are negotiated through memory, tradition and history (both written and oral) and that counter the existing periodisation of resistance and fragment accepted national narratives.[22] Oral testimonies should not be collapsed into a 'totalising history' with the aim of creating a historical realist narrative, nor treated as a monologue that affirms collective memory.[23] Rather it should be recognised that oral sources are complex conversational narratives that do not have a fixed form.

There are, however, a number of difficulties with Minkley and Rassool's arguments and many of their criticisms of South African social historians, especially in the History Workshop, are unfounded. As noted earlier, social historians have long been sensitive to the power relations that mould the interview process. They are also keenly aware of competing 'voices' in marginalised communities and recognise the limitations of individual reminiscences when it comes to accentuating differences within a particular group. Even though '…human memory is given to error, misconception, elision, distortion, elaboration and downright fabrication', social historians assume that there are 'truths' embedded within oral testimonies that reflect a shared experience, but do not necessarily adopt essentialist or teleological approaches to history.[24] Social historians often highlight the contradictory nature of consciousness and, while resistance in all its forms is a key focus, they rarely assume a particular outcome and highlight the extent to which the participants in popular movements diverge from the prescriptions of their leaders.

Social historians do not approach their sources uncritically. They do not claim that oral testimonies are direct and unmediated links to the past, nor do social historians consider oral testimonies to be conversational narratives that are uncontaminated by the researcher's assumptions or interpretations.[25] Rather, they recognise the role played by the historian in interpreting sources (written or oral) and argue that it is only through external validation that the bias of the historian can be checked. The strength of the life

history method, however, is that the power of the researcher in determining the issues that will be discussed is constrained- often allowing interviewees to contest the suppositions and knowledge of the historian. Interviews are also one of the few methods that allow the researcher to access the analysis of individuals, which, as Delius argues, can play an important part in the construction of history.

One aspect of Minkley and Rassool's critique that should be taken into account, however, is their observation that the social historians have failed to theorise memory.[26] This is not to say that memory has been ignored. For instance, Isabel Hofmeyr- who draws attention to the gendered nature of storing-telling in traditional African societies; highlights the need to identify the keepers of historical knowledge in specific communities and recognises the different abilities of storytellers- has made great strides in grappling with the complexities of memory.[27] Hofmeyr considers the influences that myth and official written accounts have on the recollection and recounting of the past and notes that oral testimonies include 'truths' that do not necessarily take the form of historical fact. Nevertheless, a much more systematic engagement with the structure of oral narratives, the influence of the present on historical memory, the interplay between fantasy and fact, and links between personal and collective memory is required.

2.3. Oral History and the Emerging Unions

Most of the scholars of the emerging union movement make use of oral sources, but their approaches to these sources vary considerably.[28] For instance, Sitas uses oral testimony to investigate the consciousness and cultural formations of metal workers on the East Rand. Buhlungu, who make extensive use of interviews, is mainly interested in tracing the organisational culture of unions and asks questions dealing with issues such as leadership, democracy, changes in union operation, and so on. [29] Maree and Friedman, however, mostly use union records, published articles and newspaper reports and draw on oral sources to 'fill in the gaps'.[30]

There a number of commonalities and scholars of the emerging unions tend to focus on union leaders rather than the testimonies of ordinary union members. Buhlungu and Sitas,

however, interview shop stewards. There are a number of benefits to this approach as shop stewards are elected worker leaders that are in direct contact with members and sensitive to their concerns. In addition, shop stewards also tend to be more articulate (making them better story tellers) and easier to access.

Scholars have also not reflected a great deal on the methodological challenges posed by oral sources. Nevertheless, Maree stresses the importance of respecting the confidentially of his informants. He notes that there were deep rifts in the movement and he was careful to use the information gained through oral testimony in a sensitive manner. Buhlungu also notes that since the first democratic election in 1994 activists have become more willing to divulge their political secrets. The collection of oral testimony in the post-democratic period, however, presents its own difficulties. For instance, there is a real danger that researchers target the more influential layer of political activists who have not only become well rehearsed in telling their stories, but have also intertwined their personal histories with the construction of a broader nationalist narrative.[31]

This study has shifted over time – not only in terms of content, but also methodologically- and has provided valuable lessons in the practice of history. What started as an examination of the political policies of FOSATU has become an analysis of TUACC. Even though this study falls short of providing a social history of the TUACC and is largely organisational in focus, attempts have been made to incorporate social history themes and methods. Special attention is paid to issues such as the membership composition of the trade unions, generation, gender and ideology.

Attempts were made to contact and interview shop stewards who had participated in the TUACC unions during the 1970s. Union affiliates were contacted and it was hoped that the snowballing method could be used to get in touch with shop stewards who had retired and were no longer part of the union movement. Only a few male shop stewards that were active during the 1970 could be traced. All of the shop stewards interviewed, however, had urban backgrounds and originally joined the UTP unions. They only became part of unions such as MAWU in the 1980s. There are a number of factors that

explain this difficulty in locating shop stewards that were active in the 1970s. Unlike the UTP unions, it appears that a huge proportion of the TUACC shop stewards were migrant. Shifts in members and leadership composition, massive retrenchments, and the transient nature of migrant labour have all unwound the bonds that once tied these worker leaders to their unions. They are now scattered throughout the rural areas and a great deal of time and resources are required to find and interview them. Such resources are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study.

This failure to interview migrant shop stewards did not result in the abandonment of oral testimony. In line with Sitas' observation that African women were the first urban-based workers to join the TUACC unions, a couple of women worker leaders were located and interviewed. In addition, in-depth interviews with trade union officials and some of the early trade union organisers have been conducted.

As in the case of the documentary evidence, the data gained from oral history has as far as possible been tested against other sources of evidence and testimonies. In so doing the particular strengths of oral history have come to light. These testimonies fill the political silences found in the documentary evidence and often explain what is going on in the minutes and union reports. The testimonies collected allow us to go beyond trade union rhetoric and uncover what was really happening.

2.4. Documents and Archives

A wide range of documentary material has also been perused. The official archive of the TUACC, housed at Historical Papers (University of the Witwatersrand), is a rich source of material. This has been supplemented with papers from specific affiliates, which are also part of the COSATU collection, as well as the separate collections that contain related material, such as the minutes and reports of the Industrial Aid Society (IAS). Articles from *Abasebensi*, which have been published on the Internet by the DISA project, and numerous articles from the *South African Labour Bulletin* and *Work in Progress* have also been utilised. In addition to the union archives, government records,

mostly published including the Department of Labour's annual reports and reports of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions, have been examined.

As Peter Tosh points out, documentary evidence is by no means infallible and '[n]o document, however authoritative, is beyond question…'.[32] The content of archival documents needs to be interpreted and tested for reliability and, as with oral sources, historians need to be aware of distortions and inaccuracies. Scholars of the emerging union movement have already highlighted a number of problem areas when dealing with union records and draw our attention to political silences; the authorship of union documents; and inaccuracies in the documents.

Luckhardt and Wall as well as Friedman mostly concentrate on articles from the *South African Labour Bulletin* and newspaper reports. Their reliance on information that had already been made public partly reflects serious concerns about security. These authors were researching their books during a very repressive period in South Africa history and clearly did not want to compromise anyone. Maree goes on to observe that this self-imposed political censure is reflected in union documents. Unionists were clearly aware that they were being watched by the Security Police and he sates that minutes were occasionally written to conceal information.

The silences within the documentation are striking at times. For instance there is little mention of the 1976 urban uprising in the minutes of the period. It is important to note, however, that political debate was not entirely wiped from the record. Often political discussions were diverted into fierce debates about seemingly mundane organisational issues. It is precisely because of their underlying political implications that these conversations were usually documented.

Buhlungu cautions that documentary sources tend to mirror power relations and are written from the vantage point of those who are in charge. In the case of the emerging trade unions, Buhlungu argues that documents tend to reflect the perspectives of a minute layer of full time officials with a strong command of English. Maree confirms this. He

claims that union organisers and shop stewards were barely literate and white intellectuals were expected to draft minutes and reports, which on occasion reflected their views on important issues. One should be careful to interpret this to mean that those in control of the minutes necessarily shared the same views. In addition, many of the minutes and documents were translated into vernacular and it would be of interest to compare and contrast these translations with the English record.

Finally, Maree questions the accuracy of union sources. Although this obviously needs to be taken into account when dealing with all records, he suggests that in the case of union documents the authorship is not always clear and the records are not always complete. Added to this, he argues that, '…in their early days, when the unions were struggling for survival, there was a tendency for them to exaggerate their achievements, presumably as a way of boosting workers confidence and morale.'[33] This means that information relating membership numbers and general support may be skewed.

2.5. Conclusions

This study is based on a combination of oral and archival sources. The collection of oral testimony has provided valuable lessons in using social and oral history. Interviews have been conducted with trade union leaders and perhaps the most notable weakness of this study is the absence of shop steward voices. Until attention is given to the voices of worker leaders and union members much of the emerging unions' history will remain eclipsed.

Notes: Chapter 2

[1] P. La Hausse, 'Oral History and the South African Historians', *Radical History Review*, 46(7): Winter 1990: p. 347.

[2] P. La Hausse, 'Oral History', pp. 347-353.

[3] See, for instance, the more recent series of local history publications: P. Bonner and L. Segal, *Soweto: A History*, Johannesburg, Maskew Miller and Longman, 1988; P. Bonner and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus: A History*, Johannesburg, Maskew Miller and Longman, 2001; P. Bonner and N. Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: a history* (forthcoming).

[4] *Revised National Curriculum Statement, Grade R-9, Social Sciences*, Pretoria, Department of Education, 2002; *National Curriculum Statement, Grades 10-12 (General) History*, Pretoria, Department of Education 2003.

[5] P. La Hausse, 'Oral History', p. 353.

[6] P. La Hausse, 'Oral History', p. 347.

[7] P. Delius, *A Lion,* p. 232.

[8] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 232.

[9] P. La Hausse, 'Oral History', p. 353.

[10] B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, 'Radical History', pp. 19-30.

[11] M. Morris, 'The Development of Capitalism in the South African Agriculture: class struggle in the countryside.' *Economy and Society*, 5 (3): 1987. pp. 8-9.

[12] M. Morris, 'The Development of', pp. 8-10.

[13] M. Morris, 'The Development of', pp. 23-3.

[14] T. Keegan, 'Mike Morris and the Social Historians,' in *Africa Perspective* (new series) 1 (5&6): 1989: pp. 1-2.

[15] T. Keegan, 'Mike Morris', p. 3-5.

[16] T. Keegan, 'Mike Morris', p.4.

[17] T. Keegan, 'Mike Morris', pp. 6-7.

[18] G. Minkley, and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory, and social history in South Africa,' in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee (eds.) *Negotiating the Past: the making of memory in South Africa.* Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1998. pp. 89-99.

[19] G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', pp. 92-3.

[20] G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', pp. 94.

[21] G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', pp. 94.

[22] G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', pp. 94.

[23] G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', pp. 96.

[24] Keegan quoted in G. Minkley and C. Rassool, 'Orality, memory', p. 91.

[25] C. Kros and N. Ulrich, 'Sharing the Burden? Memory, oral testimony and teaching history', unpublished manuscript, University of the Witwatersrand, December 2006. For example see T. Keegan, *Facing the Storm: portraits of Black lives in South Africa,* London, Zed Press, 1988 and H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*.

[26] C. Kros and N. Ulrich, 'Sharing the Burden', p. 3.

[27] I. Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told: oral historical narrative in a South African chiefdom*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

[28] There is a great deal of overlap between labour history and industrial sociology and many industrial sociologists make use of qualitative research methods. For instance, in *Cast in a Racial Mould*, which investigates the labour process in the metal industry on the East Rand, Webster uses life histories to gain insight into experience of workers. Similarly, Paul Stewart recorded the life history of Mandlenkosi Makhoba a few years earlier with the aim of giving the abstract category of 'the migrant worker' a human face. He also uses oral testimony to examine the way in which workers experienced changes in the work process.

[29] S. Buhlungu, 'Democracy and Modernisation', p. 337.

[30] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, Forward (no page numbers given).

[31] Comments made by Noor Nieftagodien, Oral Presentation for History Workshop, Oral History Conference, Pretoria, 2003.

[32] P. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: aims, methods and new directions in the study of Modern History*, London, New York, Longman. p. 70.

[33] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', p. 683.

Chapter 3:
Political and Economic Transformations and Trade Union Legacies.

3.1. Introduction

The Sharpeville and Langa massacres in March 1960 signalled the beginning of a new era in South Africa. Open political resistance was brutally crushed, forcing both the ANC and Pan-African Congress (PAC) into exile, and the African trade union movement declined. In addition to increased repression, the government embarked on a massive exercise in social engineering that was rooted in the ideology of 'separate development', resulting in significant societal transformations. The aim of this chapter is to trace the conditions out of which the new trade union movement emerged.

Often seen as a 'decade of darkness' for African working class resistance, scholars have focused on the role that the economic boom of the 1960s played in facilitating the rise of the emerging unions in the following decade.[1] It is often argued that with the expansion and capitalisation of industry, African workers were concentrated in larger numbers and their bargaining power intensified as they were increasingly employed as semi-skilled production workers.[2] Although there is some debate over the existence of an adequate industrial base to sustain the organisation of African workers in the 1950s, there is general agreement that by the end of the 1960s suitable conditions had developed for the emergence of large industrial trade unions.[3]

Economic conditions play an important role in shaping the organisational possibilities within a given context, but the relationship between the economy and industrial organisation proved much more complex than the argument above suggests. Most notably, this argument does not explain why a large proportion of TUACC's members were drawn from the ranks of unskilled industrial workers who were in the process of becoming more vulnerable. To understand the TUACC unions, which were at the forefront of creating a militant socialist current in the workers movement, we need to look at the economic boom from a different angle and consider the connections between the urban modern economy and the rural subsistence economy of the homelands.

Economic developments, however, are not a sufficient explanation of the organisational forms that emerged and the state as well as ideological and organisational factors must also be taken into account. As Lambert writes:

> '…working class resistance does not flow *automatically* from changes in production. It has rather to be related to the lived experience of the proletariat, the leadership, strategy and changes in consciousness.'[4]

African workers were caught in a web of extra-economic laws and institutions (such as the pass laws and labour bureaux), which were designed to regulate and control every aspect of their lives, and in 1953 a joint United Nations and International Labour Organisation (ILO) committee concluded that forced labour existed in South Africa.[5] These measures shaped the African labour market and will be examined in conjunction with developments in the economy. To understand the framework in which TUACC emerged it is also necessary to consider the legacy of previous trade union movements as well as the emergence of new forms of political and industrial resistance in the late 1960s, which influenced the organisational choices of the TUACC unions in important ways.

3.2. Boom and Bust: the marginalisation of unskilled African workers

TUACC' membership reflected both the increase in the number of semi-skilled production workers, particularly the growing numbers of African women employed in industry, as well as the marginalisation of unskilled workers, many of whom were migrant. To understand the composition of the TUACC unions it is necessary to consider the impact that tightening influx control measures and the collapse of the homeland economy had on workers. Social historians have long recognised that the modern urban economy and the rural-subsistence economy of the homelands were linked in important ways and this section will examine the implications that these connections had for the organisation of African workers in the 1970s.[6]

According to Deborah Posel the urban African labour market could be divided into three categories by the 1950s.[7] These included: urban workers, who had residential rights (under Section 10 of the Native (Urban Areas) Act); oscillating migrants, who maintained a permanent household in the rural areas; and men and women who had migrated to an urban centre with the intention of settling permanently but were still legally classified as migrant.[8] She argues that within a context of intensifying influx control, urban-based workers had more power to negotiate and tended to occupy the most popular jobs, which were better paid, offered better working conditions, and did not involve much manual labour.[9] New arrivals, especially those who were not linked into any social and economic networks, were initially forced into more unskilled or 'obnoxious' categories of work, although they quickly moved out of these positions once they became more established.[10]

Posel maintains that oscillating migrants occupied an ambiguous position in the labour market. Drawing on the work of William Beinart and Peter Delius, she notes that the urban experience for migrants was often mediated through migrant associations.[11] It was through these associations that young men (and rising numbers of women) were able to access the experience and social networks of older workers and tap into the informal economy and established employment arrangements.[12] Many companies preferred to employ migrants. Even though migrants were more transient and less educated than urban-based workers, they were more disciplined and employers could utilise their social structures and *indunas* to exercise control over them. Migrants mainly occupied unskilled positions, but different groupings laid claim to certain job categories and were able to avoid the worst jobs.[13] Posel notes, for instance, that one of the key failures of the influx control in the 1950s was persistent labour shortages in 'heavy manual categories' in industry and in municipal and domestic service.[14]

In the case of African women, the urban-rural divide and the gendered application of influx controls and employment practices shaped the labour market. Posel notes that due to mass political resistance in the 1950s, the apartheid government was initially unable to extend pass laws and labour bureaux to African women. This meant that women had more freedom of movement and were able to take advantage of the informal township

economy (through beer brewing, trading, and prostitution) if they were not able to secure employment right away. Although women were generally concentrated in the service industry as domestic workers (an unpopular choice for many), African women were also employed in industries such as textiles, clothing, and food that conformed to notions of traditional gender roles. Even though women were usually employed in the lowest paid and less skilled grades of work, women in the industrial sector earned more than domestic workers.[15] Posel notes, however, that in most instances it was African women with urban rights who were able to secure employment in the urban industrial and commercial sector.

The life choices of unskilled workers narrowed considerably after the government reframed its influx control policy in the late 1950s.[16] Partly in response to the mass resistance of the 1950s (including the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, and strikes and stay-aways organised by SACTU) and the shortcomings of influx control measures in regulating African urbanisation and labour flows, the government decided to keep permanent African urbanisation to an absolute minimum. Instead of accepting and even creating conditions for a small stable African working class in the urban areas (or 'prescribed areas'), influx control became inextricably linked to the ideology of 'separate development'. The reserves were converted to ethically based homelands, while urban municipalities divided their African populations into corresponding ethnic zones. The supply of African labour in the urban centres was also stringently controlled - labour quotas were imposed on urban establishments, labour intensive industries were encouraged to relocate to border areas, and the labour bureaux system was extended.

The labour bureaux proved particularly cumbersome.[17] In 1964 the government passed the Bantu Labour Relations Act that provided a comprehensive framework for the functioning of labour bureaux, which was streamlined and extended to the homelands under regulations promulgated in 1965 and 1968 respectively. In the prescribed areas all African male residents over 15 years of age were compelled to register as work seekers at the local bureau and had to report to the bureau within three days of becoming unemployed. Although the introduction of Administration Boards in 1972 were supposed

to increase the mobility of labour between prescribed areas, African workers still found it difficult to gain legal employment or housing outside of the area in which they were originally registered.

Those without Section 10 rights were only allowed to remain in prescribed areas for a maximum of 72 hours, unless they were in possession of an employment contract. Only male migrants could obtain such a contract after registering with a tribal bureau in their homelands. On registration these men were placed into a category of employment, which in theory they were allowed to select but to which they were often assigned against their will. They could be refused an oversubscribed category and some labour bureaux were zoned for providing employment to particular industries. This had important consequences as once assigned, migrants were expected to remain in that category for the rest of their lives unless given special permission to change. Registration, however, was only the first step and migrants still had wait for recruitment to secure an employment contract and leave their tribal area legally.

While political repression and government control intensified, the urban economy expanded rapidly. Duncan Innes argues that by smashing open political resistance at the start of the 1960s, the government was able to pave the way for the most spectacular economic boom since the Second World War.[18] The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by an annual rate of 9.3 % between 1963 and 1968, making the South African economy one of the fastest growing in the world.[19] Innes notes that this growth could mainly be attributed to the expansion of manufacturing and construction. He claims that while manufacturing and construction increased their contribution to the GDP from 23.7% in 1960 to 28% in 1971, agriculture dropped from 12.1% to 9.6 % and mining decreased from 13.8% to 9.3%.[20]

With economic expansion came important structural shifts in the economy and production. A marked increase can be observed in the concentration and centralisation of capital, especially in manufacturing, and it has been estimated that 10 of the largest firms controlled up to 70% of turnover in the sector.[21] Maree argues that this concentration

changed the structure of industry and led to a rise in the number of intermediate (between 200- 499 workers) and large (more 500 workers) establishments.[22] In addition, growing foreign investment stimulated capital expenditure and mechanised production.[23]

Labour was also restructured- the numbers of workers employed in industries outside of mining and agriculture grew and the racial division of labour was altered as more and more African workers were employed in semi-skilled positions.[24] Although the emergence of this layer of semi-skilled workers was an uneven process that took some time to unfold, the proportion of African workers employed as semi-skilled machine operators rose steadily. In manufacturing, for instance, Owen Crankshaw estimates that the proportion of African workers employed as semi-skilled machine operators rose from 65 to 86 percent between 1965 and 1990.[25]

Nonetheless, as Crankshaw points out, industry still employed significant numbers of unskilled African workers. In 1965 unskilled workers constituted 70% of the total work force in construction and 39% in manufacturing.[26] These unskilled workers, however, were being placed under increasing social and economic pressure and migrants were constricted in both their urban and rural worlds. In terms of life in the urban areas, Phil Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien give us some indication of the growth in municipal hostels, especially in Vosloorus on the East Rand, and the disagreeable living conditions that migrants had to contend with.[27] Migrants, especially on the Witwatersrand, were also frustrated by crime and the continual harassment from *tsotsi* youth gangs in neighbouring townships.

On the other hand, migrants were finding it more difficult to bypass influx control and migrate to the urban centres, even illegally. This hemming in of migrants contributed to population pressure in the reserves, which was growing due to the flight of African tenants from white owned farms and the forced removal of 'black spots' from white South Africa.[28] Increasing strain was placed on the already precarious subsistence economy, giving rise to sprawling settlements with residents who did not have access to livestock or sufficient land to farm. Plots that were allocated got smaller and the number

of cattle dwindled.[29] With the erosion of the subsistence economy, the dependency of rural households on remittances and old age pensions deepened.

Presented with no real future in the homelands, some migrants responded by trying to escape these conditions and setting up a new life in the urban areas. In spite of the tightening controls, they set out to gain Section 10 rights and brought their families with them, often setting up shacks in informal squatter settlements.[30] Another significant response, especially to the reliance on a cash income, was large-scale female migrancy.[31] The influx of African women into urban areas facilitated the creation and growth of a stable and permanently settled African population and was frowned upon by the apartheid government.[32] From the late 1950s government tighten the noose on women residing in the urban areas, while migrant women had to 'run the gauntlet' to secure urban employment.[33] For Africans without urban rights staying in the urban centres became a constant battle in the face of forced removals and the widespread repatriation of women.

Communities responded in different ways. In Natal, for instance, residents of Cato Manor and Umkhumbane - squatter camps that served as a 'residential haven' for migrant workers with close ties to the rural areas – were at the forefront of resisting such measures.[34] Significantly the women in Cato Manor played a leading role in the protests against the removal of African residents to KwaMashu.[35] 'Shebeen queens' and petty brewers also responded violently to the Durban Municipality's attempt to clamp down on the illegal sale of liquor and joined the campaign against local authorities.[36] In 1959 up to 2000 women were involved in invading municipal beer halls, assaulting male patrons, spilling beer and destroying the municipal distillery and in 1960 nine municipal policemen who were part of a beer raid at Umkhumbane were killed by an angry mob. Clashes between Cato Manor residents and the municipality continued over the next few months, with women such as Dorothy Nyembe, Ruth Shabane and Gladys Manzi playing a leading role in the protests.[37] In spite of such fierce resistance, the state eventually succeeded in extending control over African women. In 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act prohibited African women from entering urban areas, except with a visitors permit.[38] The state aimed to confine unattached women to the homelands and in 1967 the Bantu

Administrative Department declared that no African women (even those with Section 10 rights) were allowed to apply for family accommodation. This meant that African women had to depend on men to secure urban accommodation and urban rights.

Many rural women found employment in the decentralised border industries.[39] Iris Berger notes that in the 1970s and 1980s women made up half to two-thirds of the homelands' industrial labour force.[40] The high number of women employed in the border industries was part of a broader trend and Berger argues that the proportion of African women employed in industry rose from 30 to 42.7 percent between 1969 and 1981.[41] In addition, African women were beginning to make inroads into new industries, such as metal, and new types of work including sales and clerical work.[42] Berger claims, however, that urban-migrant divisions between women became more pronounced and women with Section 10 rights had better chances of securing employment in urban-based industries. She also claims that in spite of spatial distance, there was a possible conflict of interest between relatively better paid women industrial workers in the urban areas and the migrant women in the lowly paid and labour intensive industries in the homelands.

From the mid 1970s there was a marked decline in the demand for unskilled workers. By 1985 the proportion of unskilled workers had dropped to 19% in construction and 13% in manufacturing.[43] The percentage of unskilled workers in manufacturing, construction, and gold mining combined dropped from 70% in 1960 to just over 50% in 1985.[44] As the economy started to slow down in the 1970s, unskilled workers were not absorbed back into the urban economy and the level of unemployment soared to an estimated 21% by 1979.[45] Berger maintains that black women were particularly susceptible to unemployment and, in the face of a declining subsistence economy, migrant men were also hard-hit and placed in a desperate position. [46]

Lucas Tshabalala, a migrant metal worker interviewed by Sitas, aptly expressed this desperation. He claimed:[47]

> …you realise you can't get a job, it is a death sentence. The countryside is pushing you in the cities to survive. The cities are pushing you in the countryside to die. It's a fear that you come to know after a week without food…

The erosion of the migrant's ability to negotiate and bargain is best illustrated by the callous realities of labour recruitment. In an article originally published in the *Sash* (May 1974) Sheena Duncan noted that:[48]

> Migrant workers from the Bantustans are processed through labour bureaux which are more like cattle markets than anything else. Men register there as work seekers then hang around to wait recruitment. They wait days, weeks, months. Then comes the great day. The recruiting agent arrives. Two hundred and fifty men line up…He walks along the line and beckons those he chooses. This one looks wrong, this one looks young and teachable, this one is too old, this one looks too thin. This one says he doesn't want to work at eight Rand a week…He must be too cheeky. 'Get back in line, I don't like cheeky boys.' Those who are not picked must wait weeks, maybe months, until the next recruiting agent comes. The cheeky one won't argue next time…His children are starving and a little is better than nothing.

Migrants were forced into those 'obnoxious' categories of work that they had been able to avoid in the past. For instance, in Paul Steward's study Mandlenkosi Makhoba, a migrant worker who was employed in a foundry on the East Rand, remarked:[49]

> [w]e get lower jobs than township people. In those places where workers are gently treated we are not needed. We are only needed in those places where there is rough work.

Bernie Fanaroff, a MAWU organiser, confirms this. He recalls that:[50]

> …in Natal and Johannesburg they (migrants) constituted by far the majority of the metal industry at that time. It was only later that you had more urban workers coming in, with higher skills. People weren't really taken into semi-skilled jobs at all until well in the 1980s. This was partly because of job reservation and partly because racism particularly in the heavy engineering field...no self respecting urban worker would work there because the conditions were very [bad].

Both this lack of bargaining power and the move towards unionisation reflected a broader crisis in the migrant labour system. Sitas, who refers to the 1970s as the 'lean years', identifies a number of factors that fed into the discontent of migrants and fuelled worker resistance.[51] These included: rural subsistence collapse; repression; exposure to rising levels of violence and criminality; acrimonious relations in the hostels; decline in wages, increasing political mobilisation in the townships; and transformations in conditions of control in the factories. He argues that migrant social structures and networks were placed under increasing strain and, in their attempt to create new forms of cohesion migrants became susceptible to union organisation.

Barring the African Mine Workers Union (AMWU) in the 1940s and the 1946 mine-workers strike, migrants were not organised (into unions) on a significant scale before the 1970s and most of the factors identified by Sitas are symptomatic of a radical reconfiguration of social and economic relations in industry. An economy once hungry for unskilled, low-waged, and migrant labour was now increasingly based on mechanised production and semi-skilled machine operators. Established relations with employers (or what can be referred to as the 'moral economy' in industry) were destabilised. According to Sitas, unions provided migrants with a new sense of belonging and the means to renegotiate their relations with employers.

African women also joined unions in unprecedented numbers.[52] Hemson recalls that activists in the GFWBF were advised by other unionists to recruit women industrial

workers, who were paid low wages and live in deplorable conditions, and proved particularly keen on joining trade unions.[53] The marked growth in the unionisation of African women requires a more systematic examination. An obvious contributing factor, however, was the growth of female employment in industry and Peter Alexander notes that first generation workers, or newly proletarianised workers, tend to be more militant than those workers who are seasoned in workplace resistance and trade unionism.[54] It may also be that, much like migrants, women workers found that unions offered one of the only viable means to resist excessive controls and secure their position in the urban areas. Scholars have long refuted the notion that women, as primary care givers, are more conservative than men and less prone to be involved resistance and it would appear that, at least in some instances, women trade unionists drew on a deeper tradition of popular resistance and political leadership provided by women in their communities (such as in the case of Cato Manor for instance).[55] This may, in part, explain the militancy of women workers in the 1970s and the role that women, such as June Rose Nala and B. Tshabalala, played in providing the new unions with leadership. The reach of this female leadership was not restricted to unions with a large female membership, such as the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), or the umbrella structures of TUACC, but extended into predominantly male and migrant unions such as MAWU.

Partly due to the cyclical booms and busts and uneven nature of the South African economy, African women and migrant male workers moved centre stage in the 1970s. Thus, while the growth in semi-skilled production workers would become significant, it is important to recognie that unskilled workers were also as important a component of the new unions, if not more so, especially TUACC. The organisational approach adopted by TUACC cannot simply be read off its membership composition and additional factors, including the organisational traditions inherited from previous movements, have to be explored.

3.3. Legacies of the Past

In spite of a marked decline in organised industrial activity in the mid 1960s and the emergence of new layers of workers unseasoned in the ways of unionism in the 1970s,

linkages with past movements were not entirely severed.[56] The emerging unions were unable to escape various forms of industrial resistance created by workers and their organisations in the past. Like the unions before them, the TUACC unions drew on and were moulded by the organisational traditions inherited from previous union movements.

From the formation of the first trade unions in the late 1800s, the trade union movement in South Africa has both reflected and contested racial, gender, and sectional divisions within the working class. This was especially true of racial inequality, which was legally entrenched until the first democratic election held in 1994. Consequently, African workers were situated on the bottom rung of the labour market in terms of wages, working conditions, and rights in the workplace for most of the twentieth century.

With the introduction of the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act, which laid the foundation of the modern industrial relations system, the rightlessness of African workers was entrenched.[57] The Act excluded 'pass bearing Natives' from the definition of employee, which meant that African working class men were barred from becoming members of registered trade unions and prevented from participating in the dispute resolution and collective bargaining structures created for other workers.[58] They were denied the means to institute legal strike action and, although never declared illegal, employers were not compelled to negotiate with their unions.

In spite of these constraints African workers organised themselves into unions. The first African union, the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) formed in 1917, was quickly followed by the mighty ICU that claimed a membership of over 100,000 at its apogee. Both organisations, which were loosely organised general unions, raised broader political concerns. van der Walt argues that the IWA, which he characterises as revolutionary syndicalist, viewed the '…working-class struggle by African workers as essential to the abolition of racially oppressive laws' and in 1919 spearheaded a campaign against passes on the Witwatersrand.[59] The ICU, which some view more as political organisation that a union, became a potent symbol of black resistance as it tapped into the plight of labour tenants who were being pushed off the land in the late 1920s.[60]

By the start of the 1930s both organisations had run their course. Not much has been written about the internal workings of the IWA, but Phil Bonner has criticised the ICU for failing to develop effective organisational strategies and structures.[61] Instead of collective action, the ICU focused on individual complaints. Instead of direct action (strikes and pickets), ICU leaders relied on legal action and petitions to government authorities.[62] Instead of building transparent financial controls and democratic structures, the ICU centered on theatrical mass meetings and personality cults around key leaders. Bonner notes that: [63]

> Both Champion, the ICU's Natal leader, and Kadalie bear this stamp. Each relied more on charisma than on organisation, and each saw the standing of the union being synonymous with his own. This was damaging, not only because it substituted populism with trade unionism, but because it also gave rise to a series of personal vendettas.

African workers were mostly employed in the mining and agricultural sector, which were strictly controlled and notoriously difficult to organise. Following the expansion of secondary industry after the First and Second World Wars, African workers increasingly turned to industrial unions. Many of these affiliated to larger groupings or federations including the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions (FNETU) formed in 1928, the South African Trades and Labour Council (T&LC), which also organised workers of other races in registered and craft unions and was formed in 1930, and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) formed in 1941.

The formation of industrial unions did not guarantee sound organisational principles or structures and, much like the ICU, leaders continued to act with little accountability while unions failed to combine the political and economic demands of workers into an effective line of attack. For instance, Baruch Hirson argues that the CPSA controlled FNETU was influenced by the broader revolutionary directives of the Profintern and rejected basic reforms. These unions, therefore, failed to relate to the immediate demands of workers. [64]

Jon Lewis makes a similar argument, claiming that 'ultra left' policies and the federation's close relationship with the CPSA, which was beset by internal leadership conflicts, hastened the decline of FNETU during the Depression. [65] He, however, also highlights the negative impact that curbs upon civil liberties, especially the introduction of the 1930 Riotous Assemblies Act, had on African unions.[66]

CNETU emerged during the Second World War, a period in which employers became more dependent on African labour, and rivalled the ICU in terms of numbers. [67] As noted above, one significant aspect of CNETU was that the AMWU, one of the federation's largest affiliates, organised migrant mine workers. Moodie argues that that AMWU was able to tap into traditional sources of resistance in the mines, especially on the East Rand, and the 1946 strike demonstrated that migrant mine workers were willing to support the demands of a union as long as these coincided with their own interests.[68]

CNETU was also constrained by various forms of repression. Although punitive action against unions and strikes was briefly relaxed during the first part of the War, the government passed War Measure 9, which banned strikes in war industries and essential services, and War Measure 145, which prohibited strikes by African workers, in 1942. In addition, AMWU had to work around War Measure 1425, passed in August 1944, which prevented African union from meetings on the mines. CNETU received its biggest blows from the defeat of the 1946 mineworkers strike and the subsequent collapse of AMWU.

Like the unions before, many of CNETU's weaknesses were also organisational in nature. Peter Alexandra argues that CNETU affiliates lacked democratic structures and members were unable to hold their leaders accountable or keep their organisations free of corruption.[69] Echoing criticism of the behaviour of leaders in the ICU, concerns were raised that officials did not differentiate between membership dues and their personal finances. The federation was also subject to political wrangling between the CPSA and ANC on the one hand and more left wing 'Trotskyist' tendencies on the other. Baruch Hirson further argues that one of the key failures of CNETU was that it was unable to relate to local township struggles such as the Alexandra bus boycott.[70]

CNETU has been credited with the development of an assertive independent African trade unionism, but Lambert argues that CNETU affiliates had to rely on the goodwill of registered trade unions to raise concerns in talks with employers. Some of the more enlightened registered unions in the T&LC - including the Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU), Food Canning Workers Union (FCWU), National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers (NULCDW), and Garment Workers Union (GWU) - made great strides in overcoming racial barriers in the 1930s and 1940s. There was a loophole in the Industrial Conciliation Act and African women, who did not have to carry passes, were admitted as members in some cases. There were other instances of cross-racial solidarity and Lewis notes that the Witwatersrand and Vereeniging local committees of the T&LC supported the 1946 mineworkers strike.[71]

Most of the African workers employed in industry were male and, without organisational rights of their own, African unions became dependant on registered trade unions and this undermined non-racism and democracy. Since registered unions did not want to forfeit their rights by admitting African male workers as members, African workers were usually organised into separate structures or parallel unions. These separate structures were not able to negotiate with employers directly, which prevented African workers from holding representatives accountable.

At the beginning of the 1950s the union movement seemed in crisis once again. The T&LC splintered, largely over the question of organising African workers, while internal leadership divisions plagued CNETU.[72] The economy slowed down after the War and the bargaining power of African workers declined as thousands of white soldiers returned home. To compound all of these problems, the newly elected National Party curtailed African political and industrial organisation by passing the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) and redesigning the industrial relations system in line with apartheid policy.

In accordance with the recommendations of the 1951 Botha Commission, the Industrial Conciliation Act (No. 28 of 1956) was amended to prevent any further registrations of

racially mixed unions.[73] This time all Africans (including women) were excluded from the definition of employee and a totally separate industrial relations system was created for African workers under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes Act) (No. 48 of 1953). Provision was made for works committees; regional Bantu labour committees; a Central Bantu Labour Board; and a host of Bantu labour officers, who were supposed to serve as an interface between workers, employers, and various government departments.[74] Although the jurisdiction of works committees proved extremely limited, workers were at least able to choose their representatives. This is where any elected form of representation ended and industrial relations structures for African workers were mainly controlled by officials appointed by government ministers and so forth.

A central theme that emerges from the 1950s onwards is that the government feared that African unions would be used to achieve political ends. By creating these separate institutions, government officials hoped that African trade unions would be rendered powerless and automatically decline.[75] This sentiment was expressed by the Labour Minister in his response to the Botha Commission's recommendation to allow for the limited registration of African trade unions. He complained that, '…whatever form of control is introduced you will not be able to prevent them [African trade unions] from being used as political weapons' and argued that if the institutions created by the government were successful, 'Natives would have no interest in trade unions and trade unions will probably die a natural death.[76]

This fear that African unions would become politicised was soon realised, however, and in May 1955 the surviving unions of CNETU and the left-wing unions from the T&LC came together to set up SACTU. The new federation formally aligned to the Congress Movement and specifically aimed to combine the economic and political concerns of workers. As the chairman of SACTU's inaugural congress, Piet Beyleveld, expressed in his address:[77]

> You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter, or their freedom to move to and from places where they can find

> the best employment, or the houses they live in, or the type of education their children get. These things are of vital concern to the workers. The trade unions would therefore be neglecting the interests of their members if they failed to struggle for their members on all matters which affect them. The trade unions must be as active in the political field as they are in the economic sphere because the two hang together and cannot be isolated from each other.

As noted above, this two-pronged approach was unevenly implemented in SACTU and Lambert maintains that there were important regional variations. SACTU unions in Natal broke significantly with the past and developed a new method of organisation that was better suited to the hostile environment in which African workers had to organise and combined workers economic and political struggles without neglecting trade union organisation. Referred to as 'political unionism', this approach was designed to overcome the constant victimisation of union members and, in so doing, strengthen the weak union base in the region. [78]

One of the most prominent features of political unionism was that it sought to use national sentiment and the popular struggles of the Congress Movement to attract the support of workers. Unlike the early general unions, political unionism energised shop floor organisation by encouraging the formation of factory committees (small politically conscious groups) that operated in a semi-clandestine manner until enough members had been recruited for a union. These 'new model unions' were based on democratically elected workplace committees and rooted in strong workplace organisation. Politics remained central and unions were required to educate and raise the consciousness of their members by linking broader political issues to more immediate 'bread and butter' concerns.

Another important aspect of SACTU in Natal is the extent to which migrant workers were mobilised. Magubane *et al* note, for instance, that in April 1960 a ten-day strike by workers from Cato Manor, which constituted about 20% of Durban's workforce, caused substantial disruption to industry and commerce.[79] This was followed by a strike by

workers from Clermont and SJ Smith hostel in Lamontville that was 85%- 90% effective, with the greatest support coming from migrants.[80]

Lambert claims that this new organising method proved quite effective. When SACTU was formed in 1955, the 10 Natal affiliates proved to be the weakest. By 1961 the province boasted 26 unions and membership had increased from 5,900 to 23,000.[81] Moreover, Lambert suggests that rather than negate the possibility of creating an independent working class movement, this new approach enabled the Natal unions to influence the political agenda of the Congress movement and begin 'a process of proletarianising the ANC'.[82]

Lambert argues that older more established unions, with their 'orthodox' approach to trade union organisation, dominated SACTU in the Transvaal and the Western Cape (the NULCDW in the Transvaal and the FCWU in the Western Cape).[83] Barring the African Textile Workers Industrial Union (ATWIU) at the Amato textile plant in Benoni that organised a significant proportion of SACTU workers on the Witwatersrand, organisation in the Transvaal centred on officials who were preoccupied with bureaucratic procedure and 'proper' structures.[84] As a result unionisation in the Transvaal proved superficial and less able to withstand employer and state victimisation and repression. In addition, unions such as the NULCDW and African Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers (AULCDW) were resistant when it came to taking up political campaigns. Lambert points out that this reluctance was further compounded by the attitudes of political leaders in the province. While many of the leading figures of the Congress movement were based in the Transvaal, they were mainly concerned with 'high-level politics' and did not involve themselves in the day-to-day grass roots activity of the unions. Rather than influence the politics of the Congress movement as the Natal unions set out to do, Lambert shows that unionists in the Transvaal felt overwhelmed by Congress and feared that SACTU would loose its identity.[85]

In the Western Cape the mainly Coloured FCWU, which had developed along conventional collective bargaining lines, focused on working through industrial relations

mechanisms and also prioritised wages and working conditions over political action.[86] Lambert notes that the union, the strongest affiliate in SACTU, was modelled on the best of the British industrial trade unions and was not only well organised and disciplined, but also developed democratic structures that allowed workers to hold their officials accountable.[87] The FCWU also developed factory committees to enable the union to respond to the problems of workers in factories. Unlike the factory committees in Natal, which linked economic and political issues and provided political education, the factory committees in the FCWU were used to collect subscriptions, check the details of members and inform the secretary of disputes.[88]

Lambert notes, however, that while the FCWU tended to leave political issues and struggles to the ANC, local branches of the union were actively involved in civic issues such as health, housing, education and transport. The FCWU was often the only organisation in small country towns (many of which functioned as company towns) and the union took the lead in fighting for social improvements. The FCWU may have been much more constrained when it came to taking up political struggles when compared the SACTU unions in Natal, but was not narrowly economistic and it is for this reason that Goode has labelled FCWU's organisational approach 'Social Welfare Unionism'.[89]

The FCWU's Port Elizabeth branch, which had developed a strong relationship with local Congress structures, appeared to be an exception.[90] Anxious to prevent the Langeberg Kooperasie Beperk from implementing a wage cut in 1959, the union relied on the Congress movement to rally the support of the community and prevent the company from recruiting scab labour. The ANC also threatened an international boycott and LKB was pressurised into restoring wages to the old level. Lambert argues that this joint action did not mean that the FCWU transcended its orthodox style.[91] Other branches failed to provide their fellow PE workers with support and, given the weak response to economic action, it was unlikely that the national leadership could mobilise members to back wider political action.

According to Janet Cherry, however, the activities of the FCWU's PE branch have to be located within the local working class traditions of resistance. She argues that the trade unions were relatively weak in PE during the post-war period and working class resistance centred on community issues.[92] The CPSA and ANC often played a leading role in directing these struggles, but Cherry argues that the leaders in these organisations were drawn from the working class and, as a result, the Congress movement took on a working class character. The ANC-SACTU alliance that developed in PE should, therefore, be viewed as a working class movement, or at least, a mass movement in which the interests of the working class were hegemonic.[93] Cherry argues that little distinction was made between trade union and political work – the Congress Movement supported labour struggles and workers and trade unions threw their weight behind Congress campaigns.[94]

SACTU's success in sustaining the branches of more established unions and establishing new industrial unions was limited and Cherry doubts that the trade unions would have been able to survive independently of the ANC's active encouragement and support of workers' struggle.[95] Cherry argues, however, that in the case of PE the strength of SACTU lay in the general union, which was initially established to unionise the unorganised and hive them off into industrial unions, but ultimately served to mobilise workers into a broader working class movement by taking up concrete demands and participating in political campaigns.[96]

At the end of the 1950s a more conservative form of African trade unionism emerged. With the support of the International Confederation of South African Labour (ICFTU), the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), that was formed in 1954 and consisted of the moderate craft and registered trade unions that broke from the T&LC, helped to set up the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa (FOFATUSA) in 1959. Very little is known about this federation, although it has been claimed that FOFATUSA represented a deliberate attempt by TUCSA to undermine SACTU by forming an anti-communist alternative.[97] Prominent affiliates included the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), run by Lucy Mvubelo who was a former

SACTU activist, and the African Motor Workers Union, led by Jacob Nyaose from the Pan African Congress (PAC).[98] FOFATUSA claimed 17 affiliates and just over 18,000 members, but was not particularly active.[99]

Little use was made of the separate industrial relations structures that were established by the apartheid government for African workers. By 1972, for instance, only seven Bantu Labour Officers existed throughout the whole country. By 1973 as few as 24 statutory works committees and 12 regional committees were in existence.[100] This indicates that, as in the past, employers mostly relied on other laws and punitive measures to repress African industrial organisation and resistance. Security legislation was widened after 1960 and, although SACTU was not banned, the federation was used as a front for recruiting MK operatives and by 1966 up to 160 SACTU officials had been arrested under the 1962 Sabotage Act. [101] By 1963 SACTU ceased local operations and went into exile.

Soon after SACTU's collapse, FOFATUSA took a decision to dissolve. The demise of these federations had disastrous consequences and, according to Muriel Horrell, the number of African unions dropped from about 53 in 1961 to about 15 in 1967.[102] These figures reflect very poorly on TUCSA, which became the only federation open to African workers. Informed by a misplaced sense of paternalism, TUCSA officials set out to control independent initiatives and place African unions under the firm control of registered unions. [103] TUCSA's commitment to African workers proved fickle and once African organisation waned, African unions were strongly encouraged to disaffiliate and in 1969 the last two African affiliates were expelled. [104] It has been speculated that TUCSA was pushed into this decision by the Minister if Labour.[105] It should be noted, however, that many TUCSA's affiliates voted in favour of this decision in a climate of heightened industrial turmoil amongst white workers, fuelled by fears that lower paid African would replace white workers.[106]

By the late 1960s unions that organised African workers had left a mixed and regionally distinct organisational legacy. Some unions, such as the FCWU in the Western Cape,

were well organised and SACTU affiliates in Natal successfully combine the economic and political demands of workers without becoming totally subordinated to the Congress movement. Most African unions, however, struggled to establish sound democratic structures and either failed to champion the political demands of workers or became dominated by the interests of other classes or nationalist movements. Even though African trade unions in SACTU were encouraged to run their own affairs, established SACTU affiliates decided to maintain their registration and comply with 1956 regulations, which compelled unions to organise African workers into separate structures, in order to hold on to their basic organisational and bargaining rights. [107] While SACTU unionists were aware of and debated the possible dependence of African trade unions on registered trade unions, TUCSA purposely set out to control African unions and, in so doing, ultimately contributed to their demise.

These past organisational traditions were imbedded in the consciousness of new generations of workers. For instance, in a survey conducted by Eddie Webster of the TUACC unions in 1975, one of the respondents claimed to have been a member of the ICU. This was not necessarily a typical experience, but there are indications that previous generations passed down stories of their own experiences. In interview with B. Tshabalala, a worker leader in MAWU, relates finding her father's ICU card and speaking to him about the union.[108] Similarly, in her study of Sarmcol workers, Bonnin maintains that the older workers who learned from the old SACTU union (the Rubber and Cable Workers' Union) played an important part in keeping the legacies of past struggles alive and interpreting the lessons of these struggles for younger workers.[109] CNETU, which was mainly based on the Witwatersrand, was noticeably absent in the recollections of workers, but up to 11% of those who responded to Webster's survey had once belonged to SACTU. In addition, some of the activists and organisers who played a leading role in reviving union organisation in Natal were initially schooled in SACTU.[110]

3.4. The Revival of Political and Industrial Resistance in the Late 1960s

The description of the 1960s as a 'decade of darkness' overemphasises the break in political and industrial resistance and obscures the way in which resistance may have

continued in different and more clandestine forms. The lessons learned from older union movements would, however, become an important point of reference for workers and unionists in the 1970s. In addition, there were already signs of renewed aboveground political activity and industrial resistance towards the end of the 1960s.

As of late more scholars have started paying more attention to the underground activity of the ANC and PAC in the 1960s, particularly the armed struggle, as well as the aboveground organisations dominated by liberals.[111] Martin Legassick and Chris Saunders also highlight the unorganised and hidden forms of day-to-day resistance. They write that in the 1960s, '[d]aily life went on, and under the quiet veneer on the surface, the consciousness of many of the oppressed was changing. The full story of day-to-day resistance of ordinary people is one that, for want of sources may never be adequately told.'[112] Although much remains obscured, this day-to-day resistance – which intersected with more organised forms of underground activity at times- contributed to the radicalisation of youth and the working class.

Omar Badsha, who was instrumental in the revival of trade unions in the early 1970s, argues that from 1968 a shift started to take place in Natal.[113] Attempts were made not only to revive the Natal Indian Congress and other Congress structures, but university students were radicalised by the 'New Left' in Europe and America. Black students were increasingly drawn to the 'Black Power' movement in the USA and Steve Biko, the father of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), started to organise students in the Medical School. Badsha recalls that it was within this context that a number of cultural and study groups, such as the 'Handle in the Clay' and '3 Arts Society' were set up by youth. These were meant to raise political consciousness and even included young garment workers.[114]

Although such activity had not yet infiltrated African townships, which were still extremely oppressive, African workers were also becoming more assertive. The 1969 dockworkers' strike in Durban, estimated to be the largest strike undertaken by African workers that decade, was followed by a strike of 13,000 Namibian migrant workers in

1971 and another large dockworkers' strike in Durban and Cape Town in 1972.[115] These actions were already leading to more organised forms of resistance and a strike involving 300 bus drivers at PUTCO in June 1972 led to the creation of the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU) on the Witwatersrand.[116] While the number of *officially reported* strikes remained low, the number of workers involved in strike activity increased from 1968 onwards (see table below).

Table 1. Disputes and industrial action by African workers, 1960- 1984

Source: Annual reports of the Department of Labour/ Manpower 1960- 1984.[117]

Year	Number of reported strikes	Number of workers involved
1966	14	1374
1967	20	1302
1968	17	665
1969	37	3284 (includes dockworkers in Durban)
1970	28	2157
1971	22	2456
1972	16	3374 (includes dock workers in Durban and Cape Town)

Friedman claims that these early strikes 'were only straws in the wind', but they were, nonetheless, significant. [118] This was particularly true of the 1969 dockworkers' strike, which Hemson argues was one of the most significant events in the post- Sharpville period of resistance and signalled the revival of working class action.[119] It is also worth noting that migrant contract workers led this revival. Workers were dismissed *en masse* and the strike was eventually broken, but Hemson goes on to argue that:[120]

> The late 1960s marked a new sense of urgency in the black working class and a determination to resist whatever the consequences. Throughout the 1960s the

> objective conditions of proletarianisation were becoming evident in longer contracts and greater rural impoverishment; the subjective conditions were now coming to the fore.

Workers had also learned to adapt their organisation to the fierce repression by employers and Hemson claims that the strike was largely made possible by the underground organisation of workers, which rebutted the view that apartheid was an all-pervasive system of oppression from which they had no escape.[121]

The new workers movement in Natal did not emerge in a vacuum, but grew out of the early political radicalisation, especially of young students, and the growing assertiveness of African workers. Constantly aware of the repressive power of the state, activists and workers adopted a variety of tactics to deflect attention and minimise victimisation. The first organisations set up to recruit and organise workers in the early 1970s drew on similar methods.

3.5. Conclusion

A number of factors contributed to the revival of trade unions in Natal. Although the economic boom stimulated shifts in the economy, which laid the basis for large industrial unions through the creation of a large body of African semi-skilled production workers that were concentrated in large establishments, the unions in Natal also organised a large proportion of unskilled and migrant workers. The rural struggles of the 1950s and early 1960s had not been able to arrest the collapse of the subsistence economy nor the extension of government control into the rural reaches of South Africa, and with an increasing dependency on wages and pensions, migrants shifted their attention to issues such as wages and unemployment. Left with fewer choices as the net of influx control laws and labour bureaux regulations began to tighten, they spearheaded much of the working class activity in the early 1970s. They were joined by large numbers of African women workers, who were increasingly drawn into industry during the boom of the 1960s.

In spite of the suppression of political opposition in the early 1960s and the subsequent collapse of trade union organisation, connections with previous worker movements had not been entirely severed. Knowledge of these movements was passed down to younger generations and a small proportion of workers organised by SACTU in the 1950s also participated in the emerging unions. The lessons to be learned from past movements – particularly the repression of SACTU and the conservative parallelism of TUCSA – also became important points of reference for workers and unionists in the 1970s.

In the case of Natal, the new workers movement did not emerge out of a vacuum. From the late 1960s attempts were made to revive political activity in the region and the 1969 and 1972 strikes by Durban dockworkers represented a new assertiveness amongst workers and a willingness to challenge employers and the state. The fear of repression continued to feature as a central concern for activists and workers alike and shaped the way in which they organised. Much collective organisation and political education remained hidden, but there were attempts to set up legitimate structures (such as cultural groups) to serve as fronts for broader political activity. This strange combination of clandestine organisation and legality would all be present in the workers movement that emerged in Natal during the 1970s.

Notes: Chapter 3

[1] J. Baskin, *Striking Back: a history of COSATU,* Pretoria, Sigma Press, 1991. p. 16 refers to the 1960s as a 'decade of darkness'. More recently scholars who have focused on the history of the ANC underground have contested the notion that the 1960s represented a lull in political resistance. See SADET, *The Road to Democracy, Volume 1 (1960- 1970),* Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004.

[2] This argument is made by numerous authors, but the most noted proponents include S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today* and J. Baskin, *Striking Back*.

[3] See D. Davis and R. Fine, *Beyond Apartheid. Labour and Liberation in South Africa,* Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990; J. Maree, 'An Analysis', p. 82 disputes the argument that a suitable industrial base – particularly in the manufacturing sector – did not exit in the 1950s. He does note, however, that the rapid expansion of industry in the 1960s laid a considerably more extensive base from which to organise.

[4] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', p. 105. Similar arguments are made by P. Bonner, 'The Decline and Fall'; J. Maree, 'An Analysis'; and E. Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould.*

[5] Comment, 'Free Wage Labour' and the Labour Bureau System,' *SALB*, 3 (9): November 1977: p.1.

[6] See P. Bonner, P. Delius, and D. Posel, 'The Shaping of Apartheid: contradiction, continuity, and popular struggle,' in P. Bonner, P. Delius, and D. Posel (eds) *Apartheid's Genesis 1935-196*, Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2001. These authors argue that the relationship between apartheid and capital accumulation was contradictory and that the underdevelopment of the reserves was an important component of the low-waged economy based on migrant labour.

[77] D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961,* Oxford, Claredon Press, 1991.p. 157.

[8] W. Beinart as well as P. Bonner and N. Nieftagodien, who document the varied life choices of migrants and note that in some instances migrants aimed to settle in the urban areas on a more permanent basis, make a similar point. W. Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness', pp. 286- 309 and P. Bonner, and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus*, pp. 53-58.

[9] D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid,* p. 158

[10] Apart from unskilled work in agriculture, domestic service, and mining, work that was deemed particularly unpleasant included manual labour in heavy metal and engineering, stone quarries, brickfields, and coal transportation and municipal services.

[11] See W. Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness'; P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983 and P. Delius, *A Lion.*

[12] D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid,* pp 159-162 for discussion on migrants.

[13] For instance D. Posel *The Making of Apartheid*, p. 164 cites research that documents employer perceptions of the work suitability of various ethnic groupings in ISCOR. While Zulu migrants were seen as good watchmen, Tsonga were seen as good cleaners and sanitation workers and Pedi as intelligent machine operators.

[14] D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, p. 198.

[15] See also J. Westmore and P. Townsend, 'The African Women Worker in the Textile Industry in Durban', *SALB*, 2 (4): October 1975: p 23.

[16] Posel, D. (1991) *The Making of Apartheid*, pp. 227-255. The shift in apartheid influx control policy is also noted by D. Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African proletariat*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987, p. 74.

[17] Comment, 'Free Wage Labour' and the Labour Bureau System,' *SALB*, 3 (9): November 1977; S. Duncan, ' The Central Institution of South African Labour Exploitation' (Text of lecture delivered during NUSAS Labour Week, 23rd- 27th May 1977), in *SALB*, 3 (9) November 1977, pp. 5-17 and C. Marchand, 'A Consideration of the Legal Basis and Some Practical Operations of the Labour Bureau.' *SALB*, 3 (9): November 1977, pp. 18-40.

[18] D. Innes, *Anglo: Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa,* Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1984, p 188.

[19] D. Innes, *Anglo American*, p. 188.

[20] D. Innes, *Anglo American*, pp. 188 and 264.

[21] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', p. 79.

[22] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', p. 80.

[23] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', pp. 85-87.

[24] O. Cranshaw, *Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour Under Apartheid*, London, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. 35- 36. See also D. Innes, *Anglo American*, pp. 188-228.

[25] O. Crankshaw, *Race, Class*, p. 39

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] P. Bonner, and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus*, pp. 53-58.

[28] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 143.

[29] P. Delius, *A Lion*, pp. 146-7.

[30] W. Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness', pp. 286- 309 and P. Bonner, and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus*, pp. 53-58.

[31] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 148.

[32] B. Magubane, 'Introduction: the political context,' in SADET *Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 1 (1960-1970)*. Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004.pp. 17- 19.

[33] Widows and women who were unmarried, divorced, or married according to customary law.

[34] B. Magubane, P. Bonner, J. Sithole, P. Delius, J. Cherry, P. Gibbs and T. April. 'The Turn to Armed Struggle.' in SADET *Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004.pp. 103-4.

[35] B. Magubane *et al,* 'The Turn', p. 104

[36] B. Magubane *et al,* 'The Turn', p. 105

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] B. Magubane, 'Introduction', p. 41.

[39] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 149

[40] I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity,* p. 251.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity,* pp. 253 –54.

[43] O. Crankshaw, *Race, Class*, p. 41.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', pp. 92-95 draws on the figures provided by Charles Simkins. He points out, however, that this figure was a lot higher than other estimates. See also E. Webster, *Cast in a Racial*, p. 207

[46] I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 255. She claims that unemployment amongst women was double or even triple the rate of men. Berger, however, does not distinguish between urban and migrant women, nor semi-skilled and unskilled women.

[47] Quoted in A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', p. 21.

[48] S. Duncan, ' The Central Institution', p. 6

[49] P. Steward, 'A Worker Has', p. 81.

[50] Bernie Fanaroff, interview by NU, September 2003.

[51] A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', pp. 242-287.

[52] W. Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness', p. 305.

[53] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[54] P. Alexander, *Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid: labour and politics in South Africa, 1939-48*, Oxford, James Currey, p. 2.

[55] C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Claremont, David Philip, 1982, pp. x- xxix; C. Walker, *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1990; B. Bozzoli, Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9 (2): 1983.

[56] Other authors, including D. Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness' and M. Ginsburg, 'Trade Union Education' make a similar point.

[57] For more on the Industrial Conciliation Act see Comment, 'Focusing on the Industrial Council System,' *SALB*, 3 (10): December 1977, pp 1-3; J. Lever, 'Capital and Labour in South Africa: the Passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1924.' *SALB*, 3 (10): December 1977: pp 5-31; R. Davies, ' The Class Character of South Africa's Industrial Conciliation Legislation,' in E. Webster (eds.) *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1978, pp. 69- 81.

[58] African women, who did not have to carry passes until the 1960s, only constituted a small part of the waged working class at this time.

[59] L. van der Walt, "The Industrial Union is the Embryo of the Socialist Commonwealth': the International Socialist League and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa, 1915-1920,' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, XIX (1): 1999: p. 22

[60] See H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*; P. Bonner, 'The Decline and Fall'; L. Callinicos, *Working Life*; Labour History Group: *The ICU.*

[61] P. Bonner, (n/d). 'Division and Unity in Struggle. Part 1. African political organisation on the Witwatersrand in the 1920s and early 1930s', unpublished, p. 25, see also P. Bonner, 'The Decline and Fall', pp. 38- 43 (also P. Bonner, 'The Decline and Fall of the I.C.U- A Case of Self Destruction?,' in E. Webster (eds.) *Essays in South African Labour History*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1978, pp 121-142.)

[62] H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*, p. 127- 138.

[63] P. Bonner, 1974, 'The Decline and Fall', p. 41-2.

[64] B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union: class and community struggles in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1990, p. 40.

[65] J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924-55: the rise and fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 62-63.

[66] J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade*, pp. 62-63.

[67] P. Alexandra, *Workers, War*, pp. 82-84, estimates that CNETU had a membership of no more than 150,000. Similar estimates have been made of the ICU's membership, although H. Bradford, *Taste of Freedom*, p. 2 estimates that the ICU's membership may have been as high as 250,000.

[68] T.D. Moodie, 'The Moral Economy', pp. 22, 23, 32-34.

[69] P. Alexandra, *Workers, War*, p. 84.

[70] B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union*, p. 104.

[71] J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union'*, p. 161.

[72] For the decline of CNETU see P. Alexandra, *Workers, War*, p. 113- 117 and B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union*, p. 190- 194.

[73] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation and the Draft Bill to Amend the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act (No. 48 of 1953),' *SALB*: 2 (9&10): May/ June 1976, p. 12.

[74] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', pp. 14- 19.

[75] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', p. 14.

[76] Quoted in D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', p. 12.

[77] K. Luckhardt, and B. Wall, *Organise or Starve: the history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980, p. 97

[78] See R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', pp. 115 – 207 for discussion on political unionism in Natal and B. Magubane *et al,* 'The Turn', pp. 106-107.

[79] B. Magubane *et al,* 'The Turn', p. 107.

[80] B. Magubane *et al,* 'The Turn', p. 107.

[81] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', p. 208.

[82] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', p.204.

[83] See R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 133 and see pp. 181- 187 for discussion of Transvaal unions and pp. 246- 278 for the FCWU in the Western Cape.

[84] See P. Bonner and R. Lambert, 'Batons and bare heads: the strike at Amato Textiles, February 1958,' in S. Marks and S. Trapido, (eds.) *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, London, Longman, 1987,pp. 336- 365.

[85] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism', pp. 205- 208.

[86] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 255.

[87] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 263.

[88] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 263.

[89] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 270-271.

[90] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 270-72.

[91] R. Lambert, 'Political Unionism' p. 273.

[92] J. Cherry, 'The Making of', p. 147.

[93] J. Cherry, 'The Making of', p. 185.

[94] J. Cherry, 'The Making of', p.220.

[95] J. Cherry, 'The Making of', pp.203, 220

[96] J. Cherry, 'The Making of', p. 201.

[97] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.2: Background Document for TUACC Council Meeting (in preparation for TUCSA Conference) by Ravi Joshi, August 1975.

[98] LACOM, *Freedom from Below*, p. 120.

[99] D. Ncube, *Black Trade Unions in South Africa*, Cape Town, Blackshaws, 1985, p.100 claims it took the decision to dissolve in 1966, while D. Lowry, *20 Years*, p. 22 argues that FOFTUSA dissolved in 1965.

[100] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', pp. 18,15 and 16.

[101] LACOM, *Freedom from Below*, p. 152.

[102] M. Horrel, *South African Workers: Their Organisations and Patterns of Employment*, Johannesburg, SA Institute of Race Relations, 1969, pp. 56-8. These unions included 13 unions affiliated to TUCSA plus a few unaffiliated unions such as the African Motor Industry Workers Union, African Jewellers and Goldsmiths' Union, and the African Laundry Workers Union.

[103] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 73.

[104] HP: AH 9991: B12.2.2.2. Background Document for TUACC Council Meeting (in preparation for TUCSA Conference) by Ravi Joshi, August 1975.

[105] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 74.

[106] There are a number of wildcat strikes by white workers in the late 1960s. See S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 52- 54 and 77. He looks at deskilling of white workers, mechanisation, and the emergence of semi-skilled African workers.

[107] See LACOM, *Debates in South African Labour History*, Durban, SACHED, n/d.

[108] M. Kirkwood, 'Conversations with Mrs Tshabalala: Chairperson of the TUACC,' *SALB*, 2 (2): October, 1975, pp 51-59.

[109] D. Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness' and M. Ginsburg, 'Trade Union Education', p. 173.

[110] E. Webster, 'A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban.' *SALB*, 4 (8): January/ February, 1979, p. 51.

[111] See G. Houston, 'The Post Revonia ANC/SACP Underground,' in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004,pp. 601-660 and M. Legassick and C. Saunders, 'Aboveground Activity in the 1960s,' in

SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004, pp. 661- 690.

[112] M. Legassick and C. Saunders, 'Aboveground Activity', p. 661.

[113] Omar Badsha, interview by David Hemson (DH), December 1992 and Omar Badsha, interview by NU, November 2004.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] D. Hemson, M. Legassick, N. Ulrich, 'White Activists and the Revival of the Workers' Movement,' in SADET, *Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*. Pretoria, University of South Africa Press, 2006, pp. 251-2. and S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 44-45.

[116] J. Maree, 'An Analysis', p. 396.

[117] It should be noted that this only includes strikes reported by employers and the numbers, particularly of workers involved tends to be conservative

[118] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 45.

[119] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 529.

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 522-523.

Chapter 4:

'The Durban Moment', 1970 – 1973.

4.1. Introduction

Referred to as 'the Durban Moment', activists and scholars often describe the first few years of the 1970s in Natal as a time of ideological renewal and debate around the form that future resistance against apartheid should take. Eddie Webster, for instance, argues that the Durban Moment marked the emergence of new ideologies such as Black Consciousness and a new kind of Marxism, which led to a much more critical reflection on the tradition of trade unionism in South Africa.[1] Workers and activists from diverse political and trade union backgrounds were drawn together and created a distinct regional approach to organising workers. This chapter seeks to trace the origin and early formation of this approach.[2]

4.2. The Formation of the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund

It is often noted that the 1970s started with a number of independent initiatives, or worker centres orientated towards educating African workers about their rights in different parts of the country.[3] The GFWBF, established in Durban in June 1972, was one of these. The GFWBF pulled various activists and groupings that were committed to the unionisation of particularly African workers together and was also shaped by the worker members, who drew on their own forms or organisation.

A few years prior to the 1973 strikes, moderate unionists in TUCSA raised concerns over possible industrial unrest by African workers and African unionisation became a topical issue. In an address to students at the University of the Witwatersrand in April 1970, J.A. Grobbelaar, the General Secretary of TUCSA, warned that industrial strife at the level of the 1922 strike would be repeated unless fundamental rights were granted to African workers.[4] He claimed that,'[p]erhaps the most alarming feature of all …was the fact that any industrial strife would almost certainly be allied to racial strife.' Rejecting government arguments that African workers were not yet ready for trade unions, Grobbelaar argued that, '[t]here is no valid reason why Bantu trade union leaders and officials cannot also be trained in a manner which will ensure industrial peace…' adding

that, '[i]f this is not done, a trade union movement, which will probably not be to our liking, is almost certain to emerge.'[5]

In August 1970 Anna Scheepers from the Garment Workers Union, an affiliate of TUCSA, called for the establishment of an advice centre for African workers, who did 'not have trade unions to represent their interests.'[6] She saw such a centre, which would provide leaflets and lectures on workers rights, operating under TUCSA and being sponsored by employers. There is no indication that TUCSA supported the initiative at this time. Nevertheless, changes to existing labour legislation, including the exclusion of the homelands from the Industrial Conciliation Act, and growing criticism from international trade unions and the ILO of apartheid policies ensured that African workers received further media attention.[7]

Even employers jumped onto the bandwagon and in October 1972 the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that 'Natal employers have taken the lead in tackling the problem of unorganised African labour' when the Natal Employers Association decided to host a 'high-powered' seminar on 'The Industrial Representation of the Bantu.'[8] The main purpose of the seminar was to allow employers and unions (registered trade unions) to thrash out their ideas on establishing effective channels of communication with African workers. The seminar was to include input from two opposing academics – Frances Wilson, who called for the admission of Africans in registered trade unions and J.P. van der Merwe, who promoted the notion that African workers should form 'indigenous' unions in their homelands.[9] Although subsequent reports of the seminar indicate that employers and most trade unionists denounced the 'van der Merwe plan', no alternative model was agreed on.[10]

While TUCSA and employers aired their fears about the emergence of an uncontrollable and politically conscious African union movement, initiatives were already underway to reorganise workers. These came from a number of different sources. Firstly a number of political activists from the ANC, SACTU and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC)- including Alfred Dlomo, Griffiths Mxenge and Rowley Arenstein- believed that the time had come

to revive SACTU in South Africa.[11] Clandestine meetings were held and membership cards were printed. Two organisers, namely Bekisisa (Harold) Nxasana, who was previously active in the ATWU affiliated to SACTU and who had previously been detained for his political activities, and Alpheus Mthethwa, played a key role in the attempt to resuscitate SACTU.[12] They based themselves in the furniture industry as sales representatives to allow them some freedom of movement and succeeded in recruiting up to 100 workers.[13] Close linkages to individuals from the ANC soon attracted the attention of the security police and Nxasana recalls that he was continually harassed. Believing that the revival of SACTU was unsustainable in the long run, SACTU unionists abandoned their original scheme and with the approval of ANC underground leaders in the region threw in their lot with other initiatives that shared their goal of organising African workers.[14]

University students and lecturers was one such grouping. Friedman argues that in the late 1960s the student movement was restructured with the formation of the South African Student Organisation (SASO). While black students were attracted to the new nationalism of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), white students, alienated by the BCM, re-read Marxism and turned to the workers movement.[15] David Hemson, the president of National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) from 1968-1969, who went on to play a prominent role in the re-organisation of African workers before he was banned in 1974, confirms this. He recalls:[16]

> …at that time it was the rise of Black Consciousness and there was a turning away by black students from cooperation with white students and quite a debate about that. It wasn't really fierce, but it was quite polarising .. white students seemed to be a bit sort of bewildered by what was happening, although they had been partially radicalised by what happened in [19]68 internationally. But, people like Steve Biko, who I knew reasonably well, would sort of joke that [white] students would just become the managers of the future …

These developments, however, need to be situated within the broader radicalisation of youth across the racial spectrum at this time. Disillusioned by the perceived conservatism and failure of older generations to challenge apartheid, youth looked for new ways in which to achieve national liberation. This radicalisation played out in various ways, with the 1976 student revolt in Soweto being the most dramatic. The revival of the worker movement in Natal was also influenced by this development and it is with this in mind that Friedman's portrayal of black and white students needs to be fleshed out.

In the first instance it would appear that much like the emerging union movement there were regional variations in the development of the BCM. In Natal the BCM was rooted in a movement of young black professionals that centred on various cultural forms that conveyed political messages about the self-emancipation of black people. Here the tensions between white students in the workers movement and black students in the BCM appear more pronounced. Although these students believed that they were travelling on two distinct roads to liberation, they maintained an ongoing dialogue and kept score of each other's successes. Hemson explains that:[17]

> there was a bit of competition, a bit of rivalry …irritation, mutual irritation, but they actually also sort of respected us for having the right idea and carrying it through. It was kind of mutual respect…

Cultural differences between BCM and the workers movement in Natal soon surfaced. Hemson remembers one occasion when workers met up with BCM members that were holding weekend discussions at the Ecumenical Centre in Pietermaritzburg:[18]

> …there was a lot going on that the workers didn't approve of, like sex (laugh). It caused a lot of comment. Loud music and drinking, and smoking dope and you know all those sort of things. And then suddenly we, we being the trade union organisers…were being very disciplined and showing workers that we worked in a different way. But [workers] were scandalised by Black Consciousness…

On the Witwatersrand BCM took on a much more respectable and working class character.[19] Transmitted through the churches, the message of Black Consciousness extended into the ranks of worker structures. These included the Young Christian Workers (YCW), the UTP, established in 1971, and BAWU, originally the Black Sales and Allied Workers Union that broke from the UTP. The influence of Black Consciousness has important implications for how we understand the emerging union movement and the evolution of distinct trade union traditions. The UTP, for instance, claimed to have adopted an economistic approach to unionisation, which sought to distance African unions from political issues and encourage the move towards a more sophisticated industrial relations system that institutionalised industrial conflict.[20] Nonetheless, UTP policies were influenced by Black Consciousness and Lowry claims that '[w]hen the UTP was established, Black Consciousness was the most important form of black resistance left in the country, and this helped to ensure that the UTP espoused the cause of black leadership in the trade union field.'[21]

In the second instance, white university radicals who became involved in the union movement were not necessary homogenous. Rebelling against the liberalism that was pervasive in the English-speaking academy, a group of students were inspired by the 'New Left' in Europe and America and, stressing the centrality of class divisions within capitalist society, developed radical interpretations of South Africa and the world. Andrew Nash has attempted to define the philosophical underpinnings of these interpretations - mainly through an analysis of the work of Richard Turner (a philosophy lecturer based at the University of Natal who played an instrumental role in encouraging students to become involved in the workers movement).[22] The value of Nash's category of 'Western Marxism' to describe these ideas - even the extent to which Turner can be classified as a Marxist - is debatable. More importantly, Nash fails to establish the centrality of Turner's work, as opposed to any other text, and by viewing almost two decades of trade union history through a prism of the Turner's principles he ignores the role of historical agency and ideological difference.

This is not to say that Turner, who promoted notions of workers' control and participatory democracy and accentuated humanism and the importance of individuals achieving their full potential in society, was not influential.[23] On the contrary, notions of workers' democracy would have a tremendous impact on the trade union movement. However, Turner's influence, curtailed by his banning in 1973 and cut short by his assassination in 1978, was more nuanced than Nash suggests. Rather than establishing a coherent school of thought that was simply adopted by a generation of unionists, Turner was instrumental in providing various forums and opening up spaces for radical debate.[24]

'Left' Marxists, for want of a better term, are best understood as a nebulous grouping who were informed by a kaleidoscope of radical thinkers. They were, however, held together by a couple of basic assumptions. Firstly, they rejected the totalitarianism of Soviet socialism. They were drawn to the works of Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg as well as relatively more egalitarian readings of Marx and Lenin that featured in publications such as the *New Left Review*. In the second instance they had little faith in the armed struggle and believed that a mass based resistance movement inside the country would provide a more effective opposition to apartheid and believed that strong worker organisations could lay the foundation for such a movement.

Buhlungu argues that these white activists 'emphasised the primacy of class and class struggle and downplayed the necessity of the struggle for national liberation of black people.'[25] Oral evidence suggests, however, that Left Marxists did not necessarily do so, but rather argued that workers should lead the national liberation struggle. Pat Horn, who played a central part in developing workers' education in the Cape and Natal before she was banned in 1976, explains this position:[26]

> We were talking about national liberation, but we wanted to make sure that national liberation was going to be owned by the workers, run by the workers. I mean everybody knew that there was going to be national liberation at some point, and everybody was fighting for it in a different way. Some people went into exile to fight for it from outside, some people fought for it from the inside. The

> people who were Marxist, who believed in the working class struggle, did it through workers and most of them at that time were linked to one or other of these trade union movements. …The question was- was it going to be a change that was beneficial to workers or not? Anybody who was a Marxist had a concern about that, that it shouldn't be a bourgeois revolution…But we basically believed that whatever happened in the national liberation struggle, a strong working class leadership would ensure a more working class content to that revolution.

There were important points of divergence, however, and while some Left Marxists promoted the formation of a politically independent workers movement, others believed that workers' should form their own political party or that nationalist organisations could be won over to a socialist programme.

The Left Marxists were not the only group of students or youths who were attracted to the cause of workers and they worked alongside activists who were loyal to the ANC, SACP and other Congress structures. David Davis, who played a central role in the Wages Commission was considered an enthusiastic SACP supporter. In addition, Omar Badsha, who was involved in the initial revival of SACTU, argues that Indian and Coloured students also attempted to make contact with workers and participated in local meetings of registered unions. They were also part of the ideological renewal that was unfolding in the region and attended the weekend seminars initiated by Rick Turner. Hemson also refers to a group of Muslim youths who briefly assisted the new workers movement in making contact with Indian workers and arranging suitable venues for meetings. Youth played a central role in revitalising political resistance in the 1970s, but their part in the revival of the unions as well as the unionisation of young African workers needs to be explored more systematically.

Radical students established contact with workers in two ways. The first was through the Wage Commission, established in 1971 at the Durban and Pietermaritzburg campuses of the University of Natal, which researched the conditions of African workers and informed them of Wage Board determinations through leaflets and public meetings.[27]

(The Wage Commissions, which operated under NUSAS, were later set up at other English medium universities.) There were already incipient forms of organisation amongst abattoir and metal workers and the Wage Commission students tapped into the secret collective formations of the dockworkers, which proved instrumental in organising the strike in October 1972.[28] In was difficult for white students to make contact with African workers in a racially divided society such as South Africa and as David Hemson explains:[29]

> The workers would raise their eyebrows, but then later they were actually quite proud of us. They thought we were all hippies or something like that and then later we got quite a lot of respect because we stood our ground when different things were happening that were threatening.

The second point of entry was through a group of registered TUCSA unions based at Bolton Hall (named after James Bolton) in Durban. Unionists such as Harriet Bolton, general secretary of both the registered garment and furniture unions, and Rob Lambert, assistant general secretary of the Furniture Workers Union, supported the formation of non-racial trade unions and proved solid allies. After the GFWBF was formed, students were hired as organisers in registered unions and adopted a 'parallel strategy' of attempting to organise workers on the one hand and working through the bargaining structures that were open to registered unions to raise the concerns of African workers on the other. Most of the registered unions in TUCSA, however, were not that keen on organising African workers and Holton Cheadle recalls that this strategy only worked in the case of the TWIU, which was led by Bolton. [30]

The GFWBF pulled the various initiatives to re-organise African workers- including SACTU activists, university based radicals and registered trade unions- together. Industrial action usually led to widespread dismissal and migrants were forced to return to their homelands. Hemson argues that the GFWBF was established to overcome the fear of victimisation through dismissal and build a base from which to organise unions by creating an association on the widest and least controversial grounds.[31] Drawing on the

example of the early mutual societies that gave rise to trade unions in Britain, activists opted for the creation of a benefit society. Worker members – from textiles, motor assemblies, abattoirs and the docks- chose to establish a society that would provide funeral benefits.[32]

By this time benefit societies had become an established feature of working class culture, and while the nature and significance of benefit societies in Natal requires further investigation, Delius indicates that such societies, particularly burial societies, became a prominent aspect of Pedi migrant organisation on the Rand from the 1940s onwards.[33] He also notes that the formation of these societies emerged out of shifts in the employment and accommodation patterns of Pedi migrants. With increasing numbers employed in secondary industry and living in closer proximity to the city-centre and African townships, these migrants were able to escape the isolation and control that came with the closed compounds of the mines and the back yard rooms of domestic workers. They were able to meet more freely and were able to access a wider group of men that came from their regions.

Benefit societies were not necessarily conservative or limited in nature and, as Delius documents, Pedi migrants used their burial societies to mobilise support for rural resistance against the introduction of Bantu Authorities in the 1950s. Through the GFWBF the radical potential of a mutual aid societies was soon realised. The GFWBF not only bridged the gap between cautious and more politically aware workers, but also served as a compromise between activists from diverse backgrounds and workers with their own modes of organisation.[34]

Much like the burial societies of Pedi migrants on the Witwatersrand, meetings were held on a democratic basis with the aim of achieving consensus amongst participants. Referring to the regular Saturday meetings of dockworkers who belonged to the GFWBF, Hemson writes:[35]

> Initially the meeting took the form of 'hearings' at which workers told officials more about the labour process…With time the meetings evolved into a type of executive committee of a trade union as a chairperson was elected with a committee…the meetings were strongly democratic, with the elected leadership cautiously putting forward their views and attempting to reach consensus.

In addition, the GFWBF provided an unexpected source of income and financed a complaints service and educational seminars for workers.[36] (Maree, for instance, estimates that by the end of November 1973 the organisation had managed to raise R9,460.00.[37]) As a result, the new workers movement was able to develop an *independent* resource base, reducing dependence on registered unions.

As noted previously, activists were deeply concerned about the nature of trade unions. Influenced by the British shop stewards' movement and other historical examples of revolutionary worker combinations (such as the Parris Commune; the factory councils in Russia and Italy; and Spanish Anarcho-syndicalist unions), activists thought it best to establish democratic forms of worker organisations that were based on factory floor organisation. Activists in the WPWAB, which was also comprised of a mix of unionists that had been active in SACTU and radical students, were sceptical of the reformist and bureaucratic nature of trade unions and aimed to set up worker councils as opposed to trade unions.[38] It would appear that the members of the GFWBF were initially undecided when it came to what type of trade unions to promote. The first attempts at unionisation, for instance, took the form of a general union amongst dockworkers.[39] It would appear that partly due to their dealings with the registered unions, however, a preference for industrial unions soon emerged. It was argued that industrial unions were more suited to the existing industrial relations framework, promoted collective bargaining, and could be used to foster interracial solidarity within industries.[40]

The formation of the GFWBF represented a very important step towards unionisation. Comprised of activists and trade unionists from various political backgrounds and a nucleus of African workers, the GFWBF was shaped by the democratic traditions of

workers and established an autonomous resource base to facilitate organisation. The GFWBF, however, would soon be overtaken by one of the largest strike waves since the Second World War.

4.3. The 1973 Strike Wave and Radicalisation of New Layers of Workers

In spite of Grobbelaar's dire warnings at the beginning of the decade, the 1973 strikes seemed to take everyone by surprise. Friedman notes that while less than 23,000 workers downed tools between 1965 and 1971, up to 90 000 went out on strike during 1973 and it is often said that the strike wave marked a new mood of working class militancy.[41] The strikes also pointed to the radicalisation of new layers of workers- unskilled migrants and African women in the textile industry - and reflected both old and new modes of worker protest in Natal.

The strike wave was triggered by migrant workers employed at the Coronation and Brick Company who encouraged their fellow workers to down tools in a demand for higher wages in January 1973.[42] Although the company was relatively isolated since it was not situated in a major industrial area, the strike became a public affair- strikers were seen marching in the streets and the event was widely publicised in the press. After an intervention by Paramount Chief Goodwill Zwelithini, the strike was resolved and workers won a slight increase of R2,07 a week.[43] By this time strikes were already beginning to spread to other establishments - such as the transport firm AJ Keeler, the tea-packing plant TW Beckett and Co., several firms that employed African ship painters; and Motorvia that employed African convoy drivers.[44] The IIE's report argues that even though only a few scattered strikes had taken place by mid January, not all of which were successful, they were considered significant and attracted much media attention.[45]

Towards the end of month the strikes spread into Durban's main industrial centres – Pinetown-New Germany and Jacobs-Mobeni - when textile workers, mostly employed by Frame, downed tools. A 16% hike in rail fares led to rumours of a train boycott and, even though it never went ahead, the strike wave gained momentum. On the 5th of February 3000 municipal workers (employed by the Durban Corporation) came out on strike and

within two days this number had increased 16,000 municipal workers on strike. By the end of March strikes were taking place in other parts of Natal - Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone- and an estimated 160 strikes had taken place at a 146 establishments involving over 60,000 workers. The strikes included a wide range of participants and united Indian and African workers, men and women, migrants and urban-based workers.[46] Industrial action was concentrated in the textile and metal industry, with 26 establishments affected in the textile industry (ropes and matting; bags and twine; and knitting are included) and 22 establishments in the iron, steel, engineering and metallurgical field.[47]

The strikes have been described as a spontaneous rising by workers spurred on by low wages and the rising cost of living caused by inflation. (It has been estimated that the prices of food, clothing and transport had risen by 40% between 1958 and 1971, by another 40% during 1971-3 and another staggering 30% in 1972-3.[48]) The IIE's report argues, however, that these grievances cannot in and of themselves account for the timing or location of the strikes, which were concentrated in Durban.

The Durban Chamber of Commerce distributed a confidential letter, dated the 9 February 1973, which speculated on the causes of the strikes and suggested that:[49]

> Apart from the economic factors which might be particular to Durban, it must be remembered that the local Bantu labour force is drawn predominantly from Zulus and is, in this way, more ethnically homogenous than the labour force on the Reef. There is the possibility that the existing unrest has in certain cases been used to further political or other ulterior aims. It may also be that the large and better skilled Indian community has also served to limit the wage rate and job opportunities.

The study by the IIE counters these arguments and demonstrates that wages levels and the cost of living in Durban did not deviate in any significant way from those in other urban centres. The same is true of the ethnic composition of the workforce. According to

the IIE's report, the structure of the Durban work force was not unique and resembled that of Port Elizabeth, where a large part of the African workforce was drawn from one language group and an 'intermediate' Coloured population was present. In addition, no clear system of stratification existed dividing Indian and African workers and many Indians not only found themselves in the same job categories as African workers, but also participated in the strikes. It is also important to add that while there was a tendency for the workforce to become more homogenous with the consolidation of the homelands and the operation of the labour bureaux, migrants in Durban were drawn from other parts of the country, especially the Transkei.

It has been pointed out that the strikes were implicitly political and that the high wages workers demanded could only be met if society was radically transformed.[50] Employers, government officials and more conservative newspapers speculated that communist agitators were behind the strikes. Mindful of this '*rooi gevaar*' mentality, the IIE's discussion of outside influences is quite cautious. While there was no one organisation or grouping responsible for the strikes, the initial activity of the Wage Commission, SACTU, and the newly formed GFWBF clearly heighten the consciousness of numerous workers.

To understand how a few scattered strikes transformed into a massive strike wave, more immediate factors must be considered. The strikes were very public and, by seeing what others were able to accomplish, workers were encouraged to follow suit. Not only did strikes receive a considerable amount of press attention, but workers also struck at their factories rather than stayed at home. The IIE reported that '…the sight of large crowds of workers out on strike encouraged workers in neighbouring factories, and the strikes spread geographically road by road.'[51] A picture emerges of thousands of strikers marching up and down the streets and, referring to an incident when electricity workers marched from the depot up Umngeni Road, Mthethwa remembers that, 'I had never been involved in such a situation. It was like seeing the beginning of a revolution.'[52] In addition, it has been argued that the existing networks amongst workers played a part and news of the strikes also travelled by word of mouth.

Related to this, textile workers fuelled much of the strike wave. The militancy of textile workers, particularly at the Frame Group, set the tempo for other workers and inspired them to take action.[53] B. Tshabalala recalls:[54]

> …on the day when Mr. Frame had his first strikes. Our boss saw the road full of striking workers. He called us together and asked us what we wanted. First he said he didn't want us to go on strike. And so we must tell him what we wanted. We told him he must give us a five [R]and increase.

After some negotiation management agreed to a R2,02 increase and a committee of seven was elected to represent workers. B. Tshabalala goes on to state:

> [A] year later it was strike time again at Frame Group. In our factory the boss called us and asked why we had not told him something was wrong. And so we asked him for money again. This time we got and increase of three [R]ands and an allowance.

At this point the textile industry mostly employed African women, who constituted up to 70% of the workforce.[55] According to Hemson, women textile workers were very militant and spearheaded industrial action. They 'were prepared to move' and 'set the pace' for other more conservative workers.[56] Strikes in the textile industry maintained momentum and in August of that year a large strike engulfed the Wentex Mill in Jacobs and in early 1974 workers at Pinetx, owned by the Frame Group, also downed tools over the Cotton Wage Order.[57]

State officials and employers were alarmed by sheer size of the strike wave and feared a violent eruption might lead to a general strike. Strikes by African workers were illegal, but the police were advised not to take action against strikers unless absolutely necessary and with minimum force. There were instances where strikers were arrested - including 106 municipal workers who marched through the city-centre and refused to obey an order

to disperse and another 150 building workers who staged a march near a shopping and business district- but they received relatively light sentences.

The Durban Chamber of Commerce advised their members on the following course of action in the case of a labour stoppage: [58]

1.) Notify the Department of Labour (Telephone number 28371).
2.) Advise your workers that you will consider their demands.
3.) Advise the workers that there will be no pay for the time that they are on strike.
4.) If you consider that your present rates of pay are fully justifiable stand by these and in no circumstances move from that stand.
5.) If you feel that an increase in minimum wages is necessary determine this increase and tell them of your decision. Thereafter stand by your decision.
6.) Do not attempt to bargain as this will only encourage the Bantu to escalate their demands. Action must be positive, definite and final.
7.) Grant increases of a definite amount in preference to percentages on earnings. Percentages are not easily understood by the Bantu and across-the-board increases are of greater benefit to the lowest paid workers.
8.) Do everything possible to avoid violence but if this should arise, call the police immediately.
9.) Handle the press carefully- they may not trespass on your premises but it is usually wise to give them reasonable and accurate information.
10.) Stoppages to date [9 February 1973] have been mainly good-natured and the tactful police action has contributed greatly to this. Make every effort to keep it this way.

These suggestions give much insight into employers' attitudes, but in the context of the strikes, employers were slightly less arrogant and demeaning and in many instances did bargain with workers. Even though workers did not win the increases they demanded, most of the strikes led to slight wage improvements. The only exception was the building

and construction sector. An official report submitted to Parliament at the end of March noted that in all of the five strikes that took place in the building and construction industry workers 'resumed work on existing employment conditions'. [59] The strike wave was not without consequences and workers were victimised and dismissed. Even so, the relatively restrained actions by police, the courts and employers increased the confidence of workers who had rarely dared to challenge their employers in the recent past. African workers were not only willing to risk strike action, but frequently took part in mass meetings and marches and would often sing, chant, heckle their employers, and brandish sticks on such occasions.

In so doing, workers relied on a variety of traditions of resistance and it is often noted that they chanted the old Zulu war-cry 'Usuthu' and traditional and homeland leaders, such as Paramount Chief Goodwill Zwelithini and Barney Dladla, intervened in the strikes.[60] The IIE's report highlights the progressive role of Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, who openly criticised the apartheid government, and argues that by drawing on cultural symbols and the support of traditional leaders, strikers situated themselves within the broader Zulu and African political tradition. Harry Gwala, on the other hand, is more critical and in an interview he states that:[61]

> The workers were not shouting 'Amandla!' They were carrying sticks and shouting 'Usuthu!'. There was no Inkatha then, but what they did reflect was the work that had been done by the apartheid regime on dividing people on tribal lines.

Barring Hemson's study on dockworkers, there is very little discussion in the literature on how workers related to traditional leaders and homeland politicians. Following the creation of KwaZulu, traditional leaders and politicians were integrated into and benefited from the apparatus designed to control migrants and the growing numbers of unemployed. According to Hemson, these leaders also had an important political function and while they promoted regional and rural identities, they also decried national

oppression and opposed apartheid in order to gain legitimacy and persuade workers to exchange their urban-industrial rights for citizenship in a remote homeland.[62]

Tapping into this opposition to apartheid, workers had made appeals to traditional leaders to intervene in workplace relations. For instance, after the 1969 strike dockworkers continued to organise and asked the Paramount Chief to get rid of a particularly authoritarian compound manager/ supervisor by the name of J.B. Buthelezi (paternal uncle of Chief Buthelezi).[63] Thereafter the dockworkers invited Chief Buthelezi to address workers at a mass meeting.[64] These workers believed that the position of leaders such as Chief Buthelezi would not only shelter them from employer victimisation, giving them space to organise on a collective basis, but could also be used to unite and attract support from other workers. The dockworkers turned to traditional leaders at time when they were becoming increasingly concerned about J.B. Buthelezi and the role of *indunas* and it was also suggested that the presence of Chief Buthelezi at the mass meeting would scare those *indunas* intent on carrying out the orders of management.

Balancing legal and institutional control with the need to gain political legitimacy, traditional leaders and KwaZulu politicians vacillated in their support of workers' struggles. In the case of the dockworkers, J.B. Buthelezi was only removed for a short period, while Gatsha Buthelezi redirected workers to Barney Dladla who ignored their request to attend a workers' meeting. For Hemson this demonstrated that '[t]he collaborative African petty bourgeoisie, so freely available to meetings of overseas academics, churches, and businessmen, were being faced with the contradictions of their position…' and were unwilling to confront the workers whose exploitation contributed to their incomes.[65] Dockworkers briefly considered raising money to cover the travel and accommodation costs of Dladla to shame him into coming. [66] It was only after the 1972 dockworkers strike and in response to growing international criticism that KwaZulu government officials claimed that they would do everything in their power to get African unions legalised.[67]

During the 1973 strike wave traditional leaders and politicians (in Durban and later in East London – see below) demonstrated that they were much more comfortable in the role of mediator or 'peace keeper'. Paramount Zwelithini visited the Coronation factory in the latter part of 1972, which may have raised workers' expectations of receiving higher wages, but once on strike he told workers to return while he negotiated with management.[68] Strikers did not want to halt the momentum of their action and once again traditional leaders and workers appeared at odds. It was only after Price Sithela Zulu warned them that they would lower the dignity of the Paramount if they did not accept his word that workers called off the strike. Zwelithini did not meet the Coronation management as planned and workers had to negotiate an increase on their own.

Zulu symbols were also by no means the only cultural elements that surfaced during the strikes. According to Hemson *et al*, 'all sorts of traditions were welded together' and references were made to rural struggles, such as the 1960 Mpondo revolt, and in some instances strikers sang the old SACTU songs of the 1950s. [69]

Another aspect of the strikes that is frequently commented upon is that in the majority of cases strikers attempted to minimise victimisation by refusing to elect representatives and demanded that management negotiate with them *en masse*. Workers, particularly migrants, had deployed similar methods in the past, which were based on established social networks and collective organisation that were profoundly democratic in nature and autonomous from managerial control or influence. In his study of the black miners strike of 1946, Dunbar Moodie documents that when the moral economy in the compound was upset- usually by an *induna* or a compound manager that implemented regulations too enthusiastically - workers in each room would discuss their complaints and instruct their *isibondas* (leaders chosen by men in their rooms who tended to be older and well respected, but were independent from management) to discuss the matter with others.[70] After much consultation, a meeting would be called at a given time outside the compound manager's office and spokesmen would often shout out demands or outline their grievances, which also served to confirm the consensus amongst workers. Moodie notes that mangers who refused to negotiate with such gatherings ran the risk of direct

action, which often took the form of riots.[71] Similarly, Hemson notes that during the 1969 dockworkers strike workers also refused to elect representatives, confronted management *en masse*, and shouted their demands in unison.[72] Much like the migrants on the mines, this form of collective action did not point to the absence of collective organisation, but was orchestrated by secret networks of workers that aimed to 'build up demands of the workers through discussion' and ensure that the leader were not separated from the workers.[73]

There were instances during the strikes where workers from different factories and industries linked up. Near Hammarsdale, for instance, 7000 workers from 12 different industries held a mass meeting to discuss a joint offer made by employers.[74] Textile workers also held a couple of mass meetings, at which they formulated a general demand for a R5.00 increase.[75] The IIE report notes that textile workers were particularly well coordinated, mostly because one employer dominated the industry and the registered TWIU tried to intervene and provide workers with assistance. Organisers from TWIU tried to negotiate on the strikers' behalf at Smith and Nephew and Consolidated Textile Mills (CTM) and managed to secure an increase for male workers at Smith and Nephew.[76] Another stoppage took place at Smith and Nephew in November 1973 when management set new wage levels without consulting the TWIU.[77] Workers also demanded that the company recognise unregistered trade unions, leading to the historic recognition agreement between the NUTW, the TWIU, and Smith and Nephew.

During the strike a group of textile workers coalesced around the GFWBF, laying the foundation for future unionisation. Omar Badsha recalls:[78]

> Then the Frame factories came out and a clear leadership emerged, there was a core of people coming to the office who were leaders… there was Junerose Nala, Tsitsi Khumalo, Gugu Bayela,…They made an enormous impact on all of us because now we had a leadership which you could relate to, who had the contact, the energy, experience and they were committed to building.

The GFWBF did not have the funds to hire these new leaders as organisers, but unionists asked them to apply for UIF and come and work with them.

The strikes in Durban triggered industrial action in other parts of the country, particularly in East London and on the gold mines. According to Hemson *et al,* a strike by 200 machine operators in September 1973 at Anglo American's Western Deep Level over narrowing wage differentials precipitated a series of incidents on the Witwatersrand and Free State mines in which workers demanded higher wages, an end to the compound system, and the immediate repatriation of foreign workers.[79] The mines were strictly controlled and repressed working class action. As a result, far more violence flared than the Durban strikes - police brutally attacked workers and reports also surfaced of 'ethnic' conflicts and struggles with foreign workers. By September 1976 some 193 black workers had been killed and another 1,278 injured.[80] The mining industry was in a considerable amount of flux and it would not be until the formation of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) that African mineworkers were unionised.

In 1974, between July and August, workers in East London also flexed their muscles giving rise to a series of strikes involving 22 firms and up to 5000 workers while a large strike of some 3500 workers also took place in neighbouring Kingwilliamstown.[81] Gerry Mare (Richard Turner) argues that these strikes shared much in common with those in Durban. Sparked by a strike at Car Distributors and Assemblies, strike action quickly spread in successive clusters through the industrial areas and were relatively peaceful. Workers mostly demanded a substantial increase in their wages and traditional leaders, such as Lennox Sebe (Chief Minister of the Ciskei) and Chief Matanzima (Chief Minister of the Transkei), were also drawn in and attempted to mediate, often calling for strikers to return to work. There were important differences, however, and strikers in East London stayed out for longer and elected representatives to negotiate with management.

The strikes in Durban transformed the conditions under which the GFWBF had to organise. Workers became more confident and willing to challenge their employers and their struggles forged an assertive layer of working class leaders. In the absence of a

central organisation to coordinate the strike, workers relied on their own traditions of work-place resistance. All these factors would prove instrumental in the creation of new unions.

4.4. The First Independent Trade Unions and the Emergence of Worker Leaders

The formation of new unions represented an important turning point. Apart from grounding the workers movement by organising African workers on a significant scale, the new unions quickly carved out a space of their own. Even though white middle class unionists would continue to play a prominent role, as both Maree and Buhlungu suggest, African workers and their leaders also played a pivotal role in the creation of new union traditions.

Mthethwa remembers that, 'there was a wind of change…people in the industry were beginning to say 'No!' they were not earning enough. The working conditions were not good enough…'[82] The GFWBF proved popular and Mthethwa recalls that 'there was no other alternative for workers' and they all flocked to the offices of the GFWBF.[83] Cheadle also remembers that there was a political vacuum in the country and workers were keen to become involved.[84] By September 1973 the GFWBF claimed a membership of 8000.[85]

The GFWBF responded by setting up the Central Administrative Services (CAS) in March 1973 to provide any new unions with administrative support. CAS also included registered trade unions based at Bolton hall, which were encouraged to assist with the unionisation of African workers. [86] In addition to the TWIU, these included the garment, furniture and the motor assemblies unions. Representatives from projects such as the Wage Commissions and UTP were also involved.[87]

In April the Metal Allied Workers Union (MAWU) was formed. MAWU's first branch was established in Pietermaritzburg in June and drew on workers from Alcan Aluminum and Scottish Cables. MAWU's second branch, set up in November, was based in Durban and grew out of the previous efforts of SACTU and mainly organised in Leyland and the

Non-Ferrous Metal Works.[88] In September 1973 the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) was formed and, according to Maree, about 500 workers, many of whom were women, from a range of different companies including Smith and Nephew; Dano Textiles, Nortex, Seltex, Frametex, Afritex, attended the launch of the union.[89] By October the union already claimed a paid up membership of about 1300.[90] The GFWBF also recruited workers in the furniture and chemical industry –creating a nucleus for the Furniture and Timber Workers Union and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), both of which were officially launched in 1974.

Both MAWU and the NUTW established cordial relations with the registered trade unions, but chose to operate independently. The creation of these independent non-racial trade unions in Natal jarred with those registered trade unions linked to CAS, particularly the Garment Workers Union[91], as well as other African unions. Unions linked to the UTP, for instance, were angered by being deprived of the opportunity of organising in Natal and it was reported that Jane Bandes (later Hlongwane), secretary of the union of the Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU), 'claimed to have been unforgivably slighted' by the formation of MAWU.[92]

In May 1973 the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE), largely initiated by Richard Turner, was established and aimed to extend the educational component of the workers movement, was established.[93] In addition to developing a close relationship with the GFWBF, representatives from the TUCSA, UTP and the South African Institute of Race Relations were included on the Working Committee that ran the new education structure.[94] The IIE registered as a correspondence college under the Bantu Education Act (1953), which ensured that the IIE was officially recognised and allowed to conduct a limited amount of face-to-face teaching.[95] The IIE launched a newsletter called the *South African Labour Bulletin* for unionists who were in need of detailed analysis of pressing issues.[96] The *Labour Bulletin*, which maintained close links with the emerging unions, started to operate autonomously from December 1975 and is still in operation today.[97]

Many of the activists from the GFWBF went on to participate in the new unions. The presence of minorities in racially mixed and African trade unions was not new and contributed to notions of non-racism in a racially conflicted society. Writing of the emerging unions more generally, Maree and Buhlungu argue that the white university trained intellectuals of the 1970s differed from previous generations in that they tended to dominate important positions and left a distinct imprint on the unions. In the case of the new unions in Natal, however, activists (or intellectuals) were drawn from a variety of different backgrounds and communities. Although some had not received any university training, they were politically astute and the role of unionists such as Badsha (organiser for the Chemical Workers Industrial Union); Mthethwa (secretary of MAWU) and Nxasana (an education officer in the IIE, translator, and a member of the *South African Labour Bulletin*'s editorial board) should not be underestimated. All of the activists from the GFWBF were still quite inexperienced and had limited contact with workers inside factories. Consequently, they relied a great deal on the workers leaders that emerged with the strikes and the new unions.

This working class leadership was uneven. According to Badsha, many of the workers recruited in the early 1970s- particularly in the chemical industry- were migrant and unskilled. Migrants were not only less educated than their urban counterparts, but were also unschooled in the traditions of unions and, not surprisingly, Badsha describes the leaders from this section of workers as the 'poorest of the poor'.[98] It is within this context that worker education became a vital part of unionisation as it allowed for the development of shop stewards in unions with a migrant base.

They were joined by another type of leader – drawn mainly from the textile and furniture industries- who were usually urban based and tended to be more skilled and educated than their migrant counterparts.[99] Badsha remembers that:[100]

> the one place with people with skills was in some of the textile factories, from Clermont, with high school education and their first stop was the textile

> factories…they came from the townships and they were very young, very young, and constituted the leadership.

In addition, older unionists previously organised by SACTU also became prominent.

The new unions may have altered the organisational landscape of the workers movement, but their existence did not guarantee their survival. Repression was a looming threat. As a result, the new unions sought out additional allies to strengthen their position.

4.5. Political Alliances and the KwaZulu Homeland

After the strikes the emerging workers movement in Natal decided to work with the KwaZulu homeland government. Tainted in hindsight- particularly by the violent conflict that surrounded Inkatha in the 1980s and 1990s- this association has been downplayed and political alliances are only discussed in as far as they relate to dealings with nationalist movements that were banned. Building on Hemson and Maree, this section argues that these dealings with the KwaZulu government did not only form an integral part of the new union movement's strategy to avoid state repression, but went on to mould the political culture of the new workers movement.

Before considering the relationship with the KwaZulu government, it is necessary to locate the new unions within the broader political context and concerns of the time. Determined to avoid the same measure of repression that SACTU had to deal with in the 1960s, activists decided to distance the GFWBF from banned organisations such as the ANC and emphasised the need to gain some sort of legal sanction.[101] Although the registration of the GFWBF under the Friendly Societies Act was unsuccessful, founding members attempted to portray the GFWBF as a politically benign organisation to deflect harassment by the state and employers. In a climate of widespread apathy it was further anticipated that legally sanctioned organisations would appeal to ordinary workers who did not view themselves as political dissidents.[102]

To some extent this focus on creating a legal structure that operated openly fed into notions of workers democracy. It was argued that such a structure would facilitate the development of clear lines of accountability within working class organisations and prevent decisions from being taken undemocratically by individuals or organisations that were not under the control of workers.[103] For the most part, however, this strategy was used to attract members and secure the survival of a still very vulnerable workers movement and, as will be demonstrated, it was only later that the political independence of the workers movement became a significant aspect of the workers' control tradition.

As Baskin notes, the caution on the part of activists did not mean that they were no longer motivated by broader political concerns and the GFWBF's strategy should be differentiated from the economism of the UTP.[104] The fear of repression, however, led to a political silencing within the workers movement. Mike Murphy, for instance, argues that speaking openly about politics in the unions was 'a kiss of death' and Badsha recalls that:[105]

> We came to the movement with a political agenda: national liberation and a class base for national liberation. We never articulated it, you could never articulate it then. Most of us kept our political allegiances hidden.

Although a lot more political space had opened up in the 1980s, similar conditions prevailed in the unions and Bafana Ndebele recalls that anyone who tried to discuss political issues publicly would automatically be regarded with suspicion.[106]

The transmission of political ideas in the trade unions during the 1970s and early 1980s needs further investigation, but it would appear that educational courses and seminars served as one of the mechanisms through which broader political issues could be raised. In the case of dockworkers before the 1973 strikes, Hemson maintains that the political aims of the workers movement were presented in discussions with 'advanced' workers in secure surroundings. [107]Any evidence that African workers were being exposed to socialist or communist ideas would have, and indeed did, result in the arrest and banning

of unionists. This meant that political education had to take place on a more subtle level. The importance of understanding class divisions within South African society emerged as a central theme in worker education, but while there was a general commitment to forging unions into a battering ram against apartheid, the political goals of activists were not thrashed out or translated into an articulate political programme (at least not openly).

For Hemson the failure to provide decisive political leadership was also imbedded in the consciousness and strategies of activists (or intellectuals) within the movement. He claims that the political consciousness of GFWBF activists was constituted around a radical rather than a revolutionary critique of apartheid society, reflecting rather than leading the struggle of workers.[108] Leading unionists adopted an evolutionary approach to the development of working class political consciousness and believed that the workers' movement would inevitably came into conflict with the state, which would raise fundamental contradictions and allow for more advanced arguments to explain the class nature of apartheid society without loosing the support of more conservative workers. By focusing on popular economic demands and the legality of unregistered trade unions the incompatibility between authentic working class organisation and the apartheid state would be exposed.[109] This would force the development of class-consciousness, especially of those workers who were motivated by an overriding concern for job and family security.

It is partly for these reasons that activists in the GFWBF were caught off guard when dockworkers began searching for allies outside of the working class in the form of traditional leaders and KwaZulu politicians.[110] Hemson argues that unionists found themselves suddenly confronted with an issue that they believed would only be raised further in the evolution of the workers organisation. [111] The problematic position of homeland leaders and their relationship to the working class had not been discussed systematically in the unions and while unionists celebrated the democratic and autonomous aspects of working class culture and organisation, they remained silent on the undemocratic nature of traditional and homeland political structures.

This was unfortunate since the way in which workers related to traditional political structures was open to some contestation. Delius, for instance, demonstrates that in the 1950s the ANC and SACP made great strides in influencing the consciousness of young Pedi migrants in the 1950s and encouraged them to extend democratic principles to rural customs. During the Sekhukhuneland revolt they mobilised around the grievance that the chieftainship would become an instrument of the hated Bantu Authorities and Trust. Although they celebrated the office of the chief, migrants promoted the ideal that a chief is a chief by the people (*kgosi ke kgosi*) and transformed existing political structures by demanding participation in the inner councils of the Paramount, which for the first time allowed young men to have a decisive say.[112]

Added to this, workers were not homogenous and relations with traditional Zulu leaders could be divisive. Without any prospect of owning land or cattle, workers' ties to the rural areas started to unravel. In spite of tightening controls that forced workers to return to the homelands annually, many migrants sought to loosen their connections to the rural areas and obtain urban rights. They moved to the cities with their families and lived in squatter camps close to their factories or neighbouring townships.[113] Badsha, for instance, remembers that a lot of the migrant chemical workers employed at the AE & CI came from the Transkei and many brought their families with them and set up shacks at KwaMakuta.[114] Hemson also refers to the migrant women workers in the textile industry, many of who were also from the Transkei, and recalls that they wanted to break away from rural life.[115]

Following the formation of the new unions, a push was made to establish more formal relations with officials from the KwaZulu homeland. Some unionists viewed Buthelezi, who was in talks with the ANC, as one of '…the most outspoken of the homeland leaders in attacking the South African government' and a '…leader in the revival of Black politics in South Africa…'.[116] Reflecting the strategies deployed by workers, they encouraged strategic alliances with above board organisations that could provide the new workers movement with an additional layer of protection. Developing relations with the KwaZulu government fitted neatly into this plan. It has been argued that there was

widespread support amongst workers for leaders such as Chief Buthelezi and, with the apartheid government reluctant to act against homeland leaders, an alliance with the KwaZulu government could shelter the unions from state and employer vindictiveness.[117]

Maree divides the union movement's dealings with the KwaZulu government into three phases. The first phase was characterised by cooperation and when CAS approached Chief Buthelezi he 'warmly accepted the idea' of working with the unions and appointed Barney Dladla to deal with labour issues.[118] Dladla was invited to speak at both MAWU and the NUTW's inaugural meetings. The IIE tried to develop a strong relationship with KwaZulu and invited Buthelezi to serve as the Chancellor, and two representatives- Dladla and JAW Nxumalo- were given representation on the IIE's council.[119] Although Dladla and JAW Nxumalo were not always able to attend, their alternates (S. Ngobese and M.N. Zondi) were often present. At the same time Foszia Fisher and Laurie Schlemmer kept in close contact with Buthelezi to keep him informed of the unions' progress.[120]

Others activists were much more critical of such arrangements, which would ultimately entrench the authority of homeland leaders that were considered collaborators.[121] Halton Cheadle recalls that the decision to work with KwaZulu was politically naïve, but unionists went along with the arrangement because it allowed them to work with Barney Dladla, who had thrown his weight behind the workers' struggle during the strikes.[122] He became fairly popular amongst workers and it was believed that Dladla, who was linked to SACTU, sought to use the homeland government as a platform from which to launch a political opposition to the apartheid government.[123] According to Murphy, Dladla also had a certain urban appeal, which may have allowed him to bridge the various rural and urban connections of union members.[124]

When it came to dealing with political alliances and the state, the new union movement focused on developing a strategy that would prevent worker organisations from being repressed before they were given the opportunity to organise on a serious scale. This approach was based on gaining legal sanction where possible; distancing the workers

movement from banned organisations; and setting up alliances (first with registered trade unions and then with the KwaZulu government) that could offer black workers some form of protection. This strategy came at a price. While activists believed that the political consciousness of workers would be forged through day-to-day struggle, the fear of repression prevented them from articulating a coherent political programme. Rather than contest the role of homelands and the undemocratic aspects of traditional political structures, unionists sought to develop relations with KwaZulu officials. Alliances would not secure the ongoing survival of the new unions, which were quickly confronted with a range of challenges associated with the lack of trade union rights and racially skewed industrial relations and regulations.

4.6. The Labour Relations Amendment Act: responses to the law

Government officials and employers were deeply concerned about the strike wave as well as the revival of unions with African members. The strikes had barely died down when the government announced amendments to industrial regulations. The new legislation fortified the power of employers and represented a further attack on unregistered unions. Consequently, the new unions were forced to develop effective strategies to organise African workers under apartheid on a sustainable basis.

The 1973 annual report of Department of Labour identified the lack of communication between employers and their African workers as one of the main factors that contributed to strike wave.[125] In the survey conducted by the IIE most of the employers also cited the lack of communication as a leading cause of the strike action at their establishments.[126]It was partly due to this reasoning that the government decided to amend the Settlements of Disputes Act (1953), which was renamed the Bantu Labour Relations Act (LRA), to 'ensure effective methods of consultation and communication' and expand the machinery through which to deal with industrial disputes.[127]

In line with these aims the new LRA provided for the establishment of works and liaison committees. A liaison committee consisted of both management and elected worker representatives in equal proportion. Management was allowed to appoint the chairperson

of the committee, and the committee functioned as an advisory body that forwarded recommendations to management.[128] On the other hand, a works committee, which had already been provided for under the Settlements of Disputes Act (1953), could only be established in the absence of a liaison committee. These committees consisted of elected worker representatives and were enabled to represent workers in negotiations with management over conditions of employment or any other matter affecting the interests of workers. In larger establishments where more than one works or liaison committee was formed, the LRA allowed for co-ordinating committees, which comprised of members of the respective works or liaison committees and had similar powers to those works or liaison committees in smaller firms.[129]

Regional and national structures were also amended. The Minister of Labour was already empowered to appoint African members to the Regional Bantu Labour Committees, but was now required to select such appointments from liaison and works committees.[130] In the case of a dispute, Regional Committees were also compelled to co-opt representatives from liaison and works committees in the trade or area effected.[131] Finally, while only white Bantu labour officers were previously allowed to represent African workers at Industrial Councils, the LRA authorised the Central Bantu Labour Board to designate African members of a Regional Committee to attend Industrial Council when African workers were discussed.[132]

In addition to the lack of communication, the Department of Labour identified low wages as one of the factors that contributed to the strikes.[133] The LRA aimed to speed up wage regulation by allowing the Minister to accept proposals made by employers on the wages and conditions of employment in trades not covered by Industrial Councils. If accepted, such a proposal would be become legally binding.[134]

Politicians were not only concerned about the strikes, but also discussed African trade unions. Members of the opposition, such Helen Suzman, argued that African workers should be accorded the same rights as other workers. The ruling National Party, which maintained that equal rights would undermine the position of white workers and lead to

undesirable race mixing, rejected this.[135] Most government officials were convinced that a group of 'agitators' (identified as students from NUSAS, who, like the students in France in 1968, aimed to change the social order) were responsible for the Durban strikes.[136]They believed that African workers were simply not capable of organising trade unions and were prone to manipulation by sinister political forces.[137] For instance, Mr. Viljoen, the Minister of Labour, argued that should African trade unions be granted official recognition, the doors would be opened 'militant influences' that would be able to gain control of the unions, but which would 'not to act in the interests of the Bantu'.[138] The new LRA, Viljoen hoped, would deprive African trade unions of 'their life blood and any necessity for existence.'[139]

The LRA reflected the ruling party's views. African workers were required to rely on powerless structures to communicate their grievances and on a host of unaccountable individuals to represent their interests and negotiate on their behalf. African workers were still unable to participate directly in Industrial Councils; they did not have to be consulted on the proposals that employers were allowed to submit to the Minister on wages and conditions of work; and were barred from making direct requests for a Wage Board Determination.[140]

The LRA did have some positive attributes and included measures to protect workers who participated in works/ liaison committees and gave some African workers a limited right to strike. The Act forbade any employer from taking punitive action against any worker for participating in a works/ liaison committee or a Regional Committee and any employer who did so was subject to a fine of R600.00 or a two-year prison sentence.[141] Whereas the original Bantu Settlements of Dispute Act (1953) placed a total prohibition on strikes by African workers, the LRA provided mechanisms through which African workers- who were not employed by a local authority or in those industries deemed to be essential services- could conduct a legal strike.[142] These reforms, however, did little to empower African workers. According to Maree, African strikers, even those who had followed the correct procedures under the Act, could be dismissed for breaking their

contracts under common law. [143] Without the right to picket (prevented under security legislation) and protection from dismissal, the right to strike was meaningless.[144]

Unionists around the country were divided in their responses to the LRA. Maree and Friedman have documented the debates surrounding works/ liaison committees in detail. To sum up, the UTP linked unions in the Transvaal were already aware of the difficulties associated with organising African workers. Employers refused to deal with their unions and workers simply suspected of belonging to trade unions were dismissed.[145] For the UTP, and later the WPWAB, works committees (as opposed to liaison committees that could be controlled by management) offered workers some protection and could be used by unions to gain a foothold in factories.[146]

It is difficult to gage the position of GFWBF. On the one hand, activists sought to boycott any participation in statuary workplace committees and argued that participation in these committees promoted collaboration with government and management and would lead to the co-optation of African workers.[147] These objections were partly informed by experience. Firstly, it should be noted that activists and unionists were well aware of the incredibly difficult conditions under which workers had to organise and, through their dealings with the dockworkers, did have some experience in working with works committees.[148] Workers were very suspicious of work-place structures under the control of management and feared that participation in these structures would lead to their victimisation. Even though dockworkers employed by Grindrods managed to take over the works committee and win a few concessions (such as a code of conduct around assault at the workplace) worker leaders were continually frustrated by management when it came to negotiations over wages and working conditions.[149]

Yet, on the other hand, an entirely new strategy became possible when the NUTW secured a historic recognition agreement with Smith and Nephew. Such an agreement challenged the legal standing of unregistered trade unions, recognise them as the legitimate representatives of workers and allow them to negotiate with management on a plant level. The recognition agreement with Smith and Nephew, eventually signed in July

1974, was relatively far reaching and granted both the TWIU and the NUTW access to the factory and allowed for the elections of shop stewards.[150] These rights came at a cost and the agreement included a 'no strike' clause.

The boycott of statutory workplace committees jars with the GFWBF's attempts to exploit legal avenues to win space and advance the rights of black workers under apartheid. The GFWBF, for instance, attempted to register under the Friendly Societies Act. Later this boycott of statutory workplace committees would be reviewed as the struggle for plant-based recognition became the key focus of the GFWBF unions.

4.7. Conclusion

The GFWBF consisted of activists from different trade union and political backgrounds, including SACTU unionists, student radicals and sympathetic registered unions. The GFWBF also attracted a fair number of worker members, who imprinted the new movement with their own experiences of collective action and modes of organisation. Their financial contributions the GFWBF generated an independent resource base for the new movement and, by drawing on their own traditions, they deepened democratic practice.

The GFWBF was only operational for a few months when the conditions under which workers had to organise were totally transformed by the 1973 strike wave. Alongside semi-skilled African and Indian workers, new layers of workers, unschooled in trade unionism, were radicalised and migrants and African women often spearheaded the militant activities of workers. Once again workers drew on their own traditions of resistance and adopted strategies to prevent the widespread victimisation of worker leaders. With a new sense of confidence amongst workers and the emergences of worker leaders, the workers movement was propelled forward giving rise to the MAWU and the NUTW.

By the end of 1973 some progress had been made in defining the character and key approaches of the new workers movement in the region: democratic organisation was

considered the key to the worker movement's success in enacting far-reaching change and the new unions chose to operate independently from registered trade unions. The independent unions were still small and vulnerable and to in order to secure their survival the GFWBF sought to establish strategic alliances with registered unions and KwaZulu homeland officials. The new workers' movement was also distanced from banned organisations to avoid state repression.

Much was still uncertain and undecided. Fearful of repression, activists downplayed their broader political agenda and union intellectuals failed to challenge the undemocratic nature of traditional political structures and the homeland system. In addition, the new unions did not have a clear strategy of how to relate to industrial structures such as works and liaison committees. In spite of these weaknesses, the agreement secured by the NUTW allowed the GFWBF unions to development one of their core strategies in the fight for union rights.

Notes: Chapter 4

[1] Eddie Webster, interview by NU, November 2004. Omar Badsha also referred to this period as the 'Durban Moment', interview by NU, November 2004.

[2] It is important to note that this period of ideological ferment and organisational experimentation continues to intrude onto the present and the history of this formative period is also continually challenged (see J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival' and M. Legassick, 'The Revival of').

[3] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 40-41.

[4] 'Warning of new '1922 strike' *Rand Daily Mail* (15/4/1970)

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] 'New Body Will Aid African Workers.' *Natal Mercury*. (26/8/1970)

[7] 'Labour laws come under union fire.' *Star* (3/9/1970); 'Concern at Industrial Laws Change.' *Rand Daily Mail* (21/3/1970); 'Election roundup: Industrial Act Slammed by T.U.C.' *Rand Daily Mail* (27/3/1970); ' 'Labour Relations.' *Financial Mail* (22/12/1973); 'African Industrial Workers exploited- unionist.' *Rand Daily Mail* (4/10/71; 'The Causes of Anger…' *Rand Daily Mail* (15.9. 1971); 'Give Black Say in Union Life.' *Star* (13/9/1971); 'Give African Workers a Better Deal.' *Rand Daily Mail* (6/8/1971); 'Race Summit by Unions.' *Rand Daily Mail* (17/11/1972); 'Unions Bar SA.' *Natal Mercury* (23/12/1971)

[8] 'Natal Makes Labour Move.' *Rand Daily Mail* (12/10/1972)

[9] 'Give Africans Trade Unions.' *Rand Daily Mail* (29/11/72) and 'Natal Makes Labour Move.' *Rand Daily Mail* (12/10/1972)

[10] 'Give Africans Trade Unions.' *Rand Daily Mail* (29/11/72)

[11] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992; Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003; David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003; Rowley Arnestein, interview/ conversation by GG, July 9 1989, (HP: Karis-Gerhart Collection, Part 1, Folder 1).

[12] Bekisisa (Harold) Nxasana, interview by NU, February 2003.

[13] Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[14] Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[15] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 41-44.

[16] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[19] See for instance David Modimoeng's experiences in the Young Christian Workers, interview by Simon Zwane, November 2004, SADET Oral History Project.

[20] D. Lowry, *20 Years of*, pp. 96-7.

[21] D. Lowry, *20 Years of*, pp. 27, 153, 170.

[22] Nash, A. 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa.' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, XIX (1): 1999, pp. 66- 82.

[23] See R. Turner, *The Eye of the Needle*, Johannesburg, Spro-cas 2, 1972 for Turner's ideas. David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003; Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003; Eddie Webster, interview by NU, November 2004; Halton Cheadle, interview by NU, January 2007.

[24] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003 and Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003.

[25] S. Buhlungu, 'White Activists in Black Unions, 1973-1994' in *Khanya: a journal for activists*, May Day 2005 Edition, p. 22.

[26] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[27] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003 and Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003.

[28] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003 and D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 561.

[29] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[30] Halton Cheadle, interview by NU, January 2007.

[31] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 606.

[32] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[33] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 88.

[34] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 606 and D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 253.

[35] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 608.

[36] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU, p.23; D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 253; HP: AH199 B12.2.2.1 ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975)

[37] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 266.

[38] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003, Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003; Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[39] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.673- 680 and J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p.265

[40] P. Bonner, 'Focus on', p.23 and Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003.

[41] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 40.

[42] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 37 and IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, 9.

[43] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 12-13.

[44] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 14.

[45] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 15.

[46] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 256.

[47] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 29 and NUSWEL (22.5.73)

[48] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 254.

[49] Confidential Circular: The Durban Chamber of Commerce. 9 February 1973, also quoted in IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 30

[50] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 256.

[51] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 99.

[52] Quoted in D. Hemson *et al*, 'the Revival', p. 13 and D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 255.

[53] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 22.

[54] M. Kirkwood, 'Conversations with', p. 54.

[55] A. Hirsh, 'An Introduction', p. 15.

[56] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[57] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 60 and J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 154, 159.

[58] Confidential Circular: The Durban Chamber of Commerce. 9 February 1973.

[59] NUSWEL, 22.5.73.

[60] B. Hirson, *Year of Fire,* p. 140.

[61] Harry Gwala, interview by Thomas Karis (TK), December 1989 (HP: Karis-Gehart Collection, Part 1; Folder 11).

[62] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.508.

[63] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 614.

[64] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 618.

[65] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 639.

[66] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 674.

[67] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 660.

[68] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, pp. 10, 12.

[69] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 15.

[70] D. Moodie, 'The Moral Economy', p.4.

[71] D. Moodie, 'The Moral Economy', p. 7.

[72] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 524.

[73] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.525.

[74] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 21.

[75] *ibid.*

[76] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 154.

[77] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 156.

[78] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[79] D. Hemson *et al,* 'White Activists', p. 266; see also 'Comment: 2.Death on the Gold Mines,' in *SALB,* 1 (3): June 1974, p. 5.

[80] D. Hemson *et al,* 'White Activists', p. 266.

[81] G. Mare (R. Turner), 'The East London Strikes,' in *SALB*, 1 (5): August 1974, p. 26.

[82] Alpheus Mathethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[83] Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003

[84] Halton Cheadle, interview by NU, January 2007.

[85] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 266.

[86] HP: AH1999. B12.2.2.1: .A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Unregistered Unions, 14/5/75.

[87] See D. Lowry, *20 Years in.*

[88] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 204.

[89] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 155.

[90] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 155.

[91] The Garment Workers Industrial Union (GWIU) decided to form a parallel clothing workers union, which annoyed the National Clothing Workers Union in Johannesburg and widened regional divisions between unions in Natal and the Transvaal.

[92] HP: AH1999. B12.2.2.1.A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Unregistered Unions. 14/5/75.

[93] Mike Murphy, interview by NU, March 2003 and Halton Cheadle, interview by NU, January 2007.

[94] D. Hemson *et al,* 'The Revival', p. 19; Memorandum to TUACC on IIE. B.12.5.

[95] HP: AH1999. B.12.5. Memorandum to TUACC on IIE.

[96] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 80.

[97] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 87.

[98] Omar Badsha , interview by DH, December, 1992.

[99] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[100] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[101] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p.46; Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003; David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[102] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003; David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003; Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[103] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[104] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[105] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[106] Bafana Ndebele, interview by NU, November 2004.

[107] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 622.

[108] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 622.

[109] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 621.

[110] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 619.

[111] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 637.

[112] P. Delius, *A Lion*, pp. 18-9, 115, 133

[113] W. Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness', pp. 286- 309 and P. Bonner, and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus*, pp. 53-58.

[114] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December, 1992.

[115] HP: AH1999: B12.4. Report on the Relationship with the KwaZulu Government in the past

[116] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 97.

[117] HP: AH1999.B12.4. Report on the Relationship between the KwaZulu Govt. and the IIE, 14/5/75 and Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[118] HP: AH1999: B12.4. Report on the Relationship with the KwaZulu Government in the past.

[119] HP: AH1999: B12.4. Report on the Relationship between the KwaZulu Govt. and the IIE, 14/5/75.

[120] HP: AH1999: B12.4. Report on relationship between KwaZulu government and the IIE, 14 May 1975

[121] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 695.

[122] Halton Cheadle, interview by NU, January 2006.

[123] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003, and Alpheus Mathethwa, interview NU, February 2003.

[124] Mike Murphy, interview by NU, February 2003.

[125] Report of the Department of Labour, 31 December 1973. Government Printers, Pretoria. p. 13.

[126] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 79.

[127] Report of the Department of Labour, 31 December 1973. Government Printers, Pretoria. p. 12.

[128] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 162.

[129] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, pp. 162- 163.

[130] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p.164 and Report of the Department of Labour, 31 December 1973. Government Printers, Pretoria. p. 12.

[131] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 164.

[132] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 164 and Report of the Department of Labour, 31 December 1973. Government Printers, Pretoria. p. 12.

[133] Department of Labour, 31 December 1973. Government Printers, Pretoria. p. 12.

[134] *Ibid.*

[135] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, pp. 108-110.

[136] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, pp. 102-105.

[137] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, pp. 105,109.

[138] Quoted in IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 109.

[139] Quoted in S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 53.

[140] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 164.

[141] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 163.

[142] IIE, *The Durban Strikes*, p. 163.

[143] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 114.

[144] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 67.

[145] D. Lowry, *20 Years in*, pp. 58-61.

[146] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 58.

[147] HP: AH1999: B12.2.2.1A: Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Unregistered Unions, 14/5/75; D. Lowry, *20 Years of*, p. 60.

[148] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp. 635, 642, 665

[149] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 664.

[150] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 157.

Chapter 5:

The Trade Union Coordinating Council, 1974- 1976.

5.1. Introduction

In January 1974 the new independent unions, the GFWBF and the IIE, established the TUACC. Maree argues that the TUACC was initially created to formalize relations with the KwaZulu government and it is was only after Chief Buthelezi withdrew his support that the TUACC was reconstituted as coordinating body that centralised union resources and the formulation of policy.[1] This chapter takes issue with Maree's argument and maintains that the formation of TUACC marked an important step in the development of the workers' control tradition. Even though TUACC may have been born out of a need to set up a body that could liase with other parties such as the KwaZulu homeland[2], TUACC aimed to unite the new unions in Natal into a 'tight' structure- rather than a loose association- that would allow the unions to develop common policies.[3] The new unions already had much in common and TUACC provided a framework that enabled the unions to share ideas, consolidate their principles and organisational strategies, pool their resources and extend into other parts of the country.

Sustaining the organisation of African workers proved incredibly difficult and between 1974 and 1976 the TUACC unions confronted numerous obstacles that disrupted organisation. It was by working through these difficulties on a day-to-day basis that the unions adapted their approaches and the TUACC played a crucial role in providing a forum through which the unions could refine their methods, tighten up organisation and develop new tactics.

5.2. Founding Principles and Organisational Strategies

In one of the first meetings of the TUACC held in January 1974, Nxasana explained that in the same way that workers cannot be strong individually, unions cannot be strong and needed to unite.[4] According to the Secretariat's report to the Council meeting later that year in June, TUACC was formed because the new unions needed to act collectively if they wanted to grow and survive and the unions needed a body that could 'enter into

dialogue with homeland governments, academics and other institutions concerned with the problems faced by the masses of unorganised workers'.[5] The Secretariat argued that only with the formation of TUACC 'could we evolve a common and broad based approach to the building of the unions'.[6] The new unions were already working closely and TUACC adopted many of the policies and practices developed under the GFWBF. Even at this early stage TUACC adopted polices and strategies that would become a core part of the workers' control tradition.

Although the TUACC accepted 'interested parties' (such as the IIE) as members, it was structured to ensure that the elected representatives of workers dominated the organization. The TUACC consisted of a Council, which met every three months, and a Secretariat, elected by the Council, which implemented the decisions taken by the Council and took care of the day-to-day running of the organization.[7] Only trade union members were officially represented on the Council and even though representatives of 'interested parties' were allowed to speak at Council meetings, they were given no voting rights.[8]

One of the most distinctive of TUACC's policies was that only 'open' trade unions would be allowed to affiliate. Open trade unions were defined as those that accepted all workers '…regardless of race, religion or sex'.[9] By insisting that workers of all race groups be organized into the *same* trade union, the TUACC challenged the long established practice of organizing African workers separately and fundamentally defied racial segregation within the trade union movement that had long been promoted the government. Like the GFWBF, TUACC also supported the formation of broad based industrial unions. Ideally, such unions would organise on a national level and be united under a national federation to avoid the fragmentation of workers and minimise sectoral divisions.[10] In addition, unregistered industrial unions would be able to cooperate with registered trade unions and thereby take advantage of the rights under the existing legislation.

The TUACC unions tapped into workers newfound enthusiasm to unionise and recruited workers on a mass basis. However, Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich note that, even during

this formative period, TUACC emphasised the development of worker leaders and the creation of shop stewards structures.[11] They claim that mass mobilisation existed alongside strategies of in-depth factory organisation. Due to the lack of resources and experienced organisers, however, unions were not always able to cope and in some instances organisation proved haphazard.

By mid 1974 the NUTW had recruited some 5000 members.[12] According to Maree, the recognition victory at Smith and Nephew instigated an important shift in the union. The mass recruitment of workers outside factory gates led to a weak base with a high turn over in membership and a reliance on organisers.[13] The recognition agreement required a union structure that would allow workers to deal with management on a day-today basis and by early 1974 a new organisational strategy, based on in-depth factory organisation, had already been devised (although it would take some time to implement).[14] Organisers were assigned to specific factories and those factories with a small union membership were dropped. Shop stewards had to play a central role and were expected to recruit members, collect dues and handle complaints. In addition the NUTW continued to work closely with the TWIU, especially at Smith and Nephew, and these unions made great strides in creating unity between African and Indian workers and the TWIU raised the concerns of the NUTW at regional and national Industrial Council meetings. The recognition agreement at Smith and Nephew raised the expectations of all the open trade unions. The NUTW entered into negotiations with South African Fabrics, winning factory access, and unionists believed that they would sign another recognition agreement in the near future.

MAWU also grew rapidly and claimed a combined membership of 3,883 by July 1974.[15] The union had a strong fighting spirit and while it formally boycotted any participation in wage and liaison committees, the union fought for recognition at a variety of companies including Glacier Bearings, Caravan International, Leyland, Hewlett's Aluminium and Sarmcol.[16] MAWU also encouraged the election of shop stewards and Ensor reports that MAWU shop stewards were holding regular meetings and received education from the union as well as the IIE.[17] MAWU's Pietermaritzburg branch was also asked to include

rubber and motor repair workers.[18] Although their inclusion blurred industrial boundaries, these workers had previously been unionised and their experience and 'high level of consciousness' were viewed as assets.

As noted above, the GFWBF also expanded significantly[19] The main strategy of the GFWBF was to organise workers into industrial sectors. Once a sector was considered strong enough a union would be formed.[20] In 1974 two unions emerged out of the GFWBF. These included the Furniture and Timber Workers Union (FTWU) and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU).[21]

The differences between the FTWU and the CWIU are striking. According to Ensor, furniture workers originally joined the GFWBF in late 1972/ early 1973 and were under the impression that the GFWBF was a union.[22] By the time the union was formed many had already lost faith in trade unions as the GFWBF had failed to negotiate on their behalf and improve their conditions. In addition, the actual status of the FTWU is vague and it has been documented that the union was originally established under David Hemson as a parallel to the registered furniture union in TUCSA.[23] The FTWU seems to have gained little from this arrangement and was continually rebuffed by the registered union.[24] The union, disrupted further by internal squabbles, eventually collapsed due to financial mismanagement in 1976.

The origins of the CWIU can be traced to a group of workers from African Explosives and Chemical Industries, owned by Anglo American, who joined the GFWBF at the end of 1973.[25] A parallel chemical union, namely the South African Chemical Workers Union (SACWU) that was linked to the UTP, was already operating in Johannesburg. It was suggested, it is not clear by whom, that SACWU should extend to Durban and become a national union, but it would appear that SACWU's parent union rejected the idea.[26] The formation of CWIU was therefore purely a TUACC initiative and in June 1974 Omar Badsha was appointed as the organiser.[27] In spite of the lack of resources and experienced organisers, chemical workers chose to build carefully. Members were encouraged to organise themselves by taking a lead in recruiting and the union mostly relied on

organisers and TUACC staff to handle money and other minor problems. According to Mare, factories were chosen on three basic criteria: a high level of self-activity amongst workers, size (the chemical industry was made of many small establishments with a few very large ones), and the attitudes of management.[28] By August an estimated 816 workers had been recruited from AE&CI, Chrome Chemicals and Contact Packers and the union was launched in November 1974 with 1000 members.[29] Like other TUACC affiliates, the CWIU boycotted works and liaison committees and focused on fighting for recognition.[30]

5.3. Organisational Decline

It has been argued that once the euphoria of the 1973 strike wore off the emerging union movement went into decline. As Hemson *et al* note, there is some debate relating to the timing of this nadir.[31] Friedman dates the slump from late 1974 onwards, but figures reported to the TUACC secretariat in June 1975 indicate that the TUACC unions were still experiencing some growth during this year- NUTW claimed 7,500 members; MAWU had approximately 5,000 members; the CWIU reported 2,300 signed up members with 900 paid up; and the general and industrial sections of the TGWU (previously the GFWBF) claimed a combined membership of 20,000 cardholders with 5,000 of these paid up.[32] By August MAWU reported a membership of 6500, with a third of these paid up, while the CWIU membership seemed to stabilise at about 2400.[33]

Maree, however, argues that the number of signed up members does not reflect lapsed membership. The amounts received from subscriptions are a much more accurate reflection of the open unions' organisational strength and reflect that the crisis manifested from 1975 onwards.[34] He maintains that between September 1974 and July 1975 the average amount received from subscriptions by the NUTW on a monthly basis dropped from R1437 to R1108 and this halved in the second half of 1975.[35] MAWU's paid up membership declined slightly and average monthly subscriptions dropped from R1064 in February 1975 to between R800 to R1000 in August of that year.[36] While Maree does not contest the membership figures given by the CWIU, he argues that the union was in a state of collapse by the end of year.[37] The membership of the TGWU is more difficult to gauge. Maree estimates that at the official launch of the union in July, the union claimed

25,000 card members, a third of which were paid up, which suggests a substantial increase from the figures quoted by TUACC in June.[38] By August the *general sector* collected R2491 in subscriptio ns, indicating a membership of 5600, which is also an improvement on TUACC's estimates.[39]

It is perhaps the sharp decline of the NUTW, the strongest of the TUACC unions, which signalled that the new workers' movement was beginning to recede. The figures given by TUACC and Maree conflict- making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the growth or decline in membership- but suggest that any significant decreases in the membership of other affiliates took place towards the end of 1975. Membership figures are incomplete and inconsistent and are not an accurate measure of organisational strength. Since the open unions struggled to implement firm financial controls, subscriptions are also unreliable.

Nevertheless, it is clear that 1974-5 proved to be a difficult time for the open unions, which had to adjust to the realities of organizing black workers in the aftermath of a huge worker uprising and the recognition victory at Smith and Nephew. The downturn of the union movement in Natal manifested in the failure to establish a sustained presence in factories (which led to an unstable membership and organisational base), the loss of key strikes and the inability to make any headway in their campaign for trade union recognition.

5.4. Employer, State, and Worker Responses to the Open Unions

A number of factors hampered unionisation – including a downturn in the economy and rising unemployment, which further undermined the bargaining power of the open unions; the hostile attitudes and heavy handed actions of employers and managers, who aimed to regain control over African workers and prevent unregistered unions from gaining a foothold in their establishments; and state harassment, designed to intimidated workers and disrupt the day-to-day operations of the unions. In addition, the open unions had to challenge negative perceptions of unions, especially workers' fear of joining

unions in a climate of widespread repression and victimization, as well as opposition from workers who set out to undermine organisation in their own workplaces.

To understand the impact that the economic slow-down had on unionisation it is necessary briefly to consider the bargaining power of TUACC members. Webster's survey, conducted towards the end of 1975, indicates that 80-90% of TUACC's members were either unskilled or lower-semi-skilled.[40] The CWIU's membership consisted of 57% unskilled workers and 29% 'lower-semi skilled'.[41] MAWU's membership was split in roughly equal proportions between unskilled workers, estimated at 47%, and lower semi-skilled workers, which constituted 41% of the membership.[42] Members of the NUTW were more skilled with 14% classified as unskilled, 73% as lower semi-skilled, and 10% higher semi-skilled.[43] This distribution of lower and higher semi-skilled work in the NUTW is explained by Alan Hirsch, who argues that due to the technological advances in the textile industry, capitalisation did not translate into a demand for skilled labour to operate machinery and production was mostly based on semi-skilled and unskilled work described as 'highly repetitive' with no need for initiative.[44] Such work, capitalists maintained, was particularly well suited for young African women who would be able to become productive after a couple of months training.

As noted in Chapter 3, the downturn in the economy was accompanied by a structural shift away from a reliance on unskilled labour. This meant that unskilled workers who were retrenched or dismissed from the mid 1970s onwards had less chance of being absorbed back into the urban-based economy. As unskilled workers became expendable, the bargaining power of unions such as CWIU and MAWU deteriorated when the chemical and metal sectors experienced a recession in 1975 and 1976 respectively.[45] Employers found the semi-skilled members of the NUTW more difficult to replace, which partly accounts for the initial successes of the union. According to Hirsh, however, the South African textile industry (which catered for a limited local market, proved unable to compete effectively on the world market, and was heavily reliant on government protection) had already been faltering for a number of decades and was particularly prone to economic slumps.[46] Workers were often expected to absorb the costs

of falls in production through lay-offs and short time arrangements. The industry experienced a number of slumps during the 1970s and Maree notes that by March 1975 more than 10,000 textile workers had been laid off, with thousands more on short-time.[47]

The hostility on the part of employers has been cited as another key factor that curbed unionisation and greatly frustrated the struggle for recognition. Maree argues that once the 1973 strikes wave passed, employers quickly reasserted their dominance. They were compelled to bargain with registered unions, but employers and managers rejected any meaningful negotiations with African workers on substantive issues and did not tolerate unregistered unions. Some employers may have been guided by a sense of racial paternalism, even calling on experts to decipher 'Bantu customs' and to supply materials and education on how to transcend cultural distance in the workplace.[48] Believing that they understood the needs of their African workers, who were not considered sophisticated enough for 'responsible' unionism, employers were usually suspicious of independent worker initiatives and only abided industrial relations structures (such as liaison committees) that ensured management retained control. Industrial action was often attributed to outside agitators and management did not hesitate to call the Labour Department or the police to solve disputes.[49] For the most part, the workplace in the South African context was structured by racial inequality and prejudice.[50] Operating within a society designed to regulate the African population, employers were able to wield substantial authority, which they often exercised arbitrarily, and African workers, who were frequently subjected to racial abuse and even violence, were rendered almost powerless.

The victimization of union members, lockouts, widespread dismissal and the arrest and prosecution of strikers were common tactics deployed by employers to undermine autonomous worker organisation.[51] Employers and managers used the migrant labour system to 'weed out' unionists by refusing to renew their contracts and victimization often came in the forms of redundancy. Respondents to Webster's' survey noted that '[i]f the factory has to go on short time…it is the union activists who are laid off first.'[52] According to Maree, employers and managers also set up liaison committees to prevent

trade unions from taking root and the number of statutory committees increased from 773 liaison and 125 works committees in 1973 to 2505 liaison and 301 works committees in 1977.[53] By establishing committees employers argued that they had provided the necessary channels of communication and could not be expected to deal with trade unions or other autonomous worker structures.

Employer's views of trade unions *vis-à-vis* liaison committees is demonstrated by the evidence given by Pinetext management in the case of the *State vs. T. Colgien Mbali* (who was accused of inciting an illegal strike- see below)[54]. Mr Setterberg testified to the following:[55]

> **Would it have been the policy not to speak to the workers via a union?** We were only prepared to speak to workers via our Liaison Committee.
>
> **Can you then tell us what is the attitude of the company with regard to Unions and Committees formed by workers?** (Silence)
>
> **Firstly, I will make it simple, are they against or are they for them?** …The company policy is that it will negotiate through Liaison Committees. These were established for this purpose. It will not negotiate with any outside organisation, be it a 'committee' or be it a Textile Workers Union or any outside organisation.
>
> **Under no circumstances will the company negotiate with a voluntary association of workers created by themselves for their own purposes?** No. It [the company] sees no necessity to do so because workers have elected representatives to do just that.

Employers devised various strategies to break the open unions and thwart their demands for recognition. In March 1974 Leyland dismissed 104 of the 177 workers who went out on strike to demand the recognition of MAWU. Fearful of international criticism, Leyland's management retreated and agreed to enter into negotiations with MAWU and to reinstate workers.[56] Maree argues that Leyland management soon changed tack again, and, under the guise of a recession in the British motor industry, dismissed 65 workers, including the strongest and most influential unionists, which broke the back of MAWU at

the company. Maree also points to cases where management would enter into negotiations with open unions, only to draw out discussions.[57] The activities of unions would be contained and their resources, momentum, and support worn down. This is a tactic deployed by SA Fabrics that held regular meetings with the NUTW from June 1974, which produced few concrete results. Support for the union dwindled and the union eventually withdrew from the company in mid 1976.

The prosecution of Mbali also revealed the extent to which the Labour Department collaborated with employers. In April 1974 the NUTW attempted to organise one of the first legal strikes by African workers at Pinetex to protest against the victimization of six contract workers. Mbali, the union organiser, was charged and prosecuted for inciting an illegal strike.[58] He was found guilty on a minor technicality in that the documentation required by the Department of Labour for legal strike action was handed to the Labour Office in Pinetown instead of Durban.

The Labour Department was also slow to act against employers who blatantly transgressed labour regulations. Such disregard for workers' rights is illustrated by the GFWBF's dealings with the Pinetown based Reynolds shoe-component company during the first half of 1974. Workers were locked-out for demanding a wage increase through their works committee and the GFWBF helped workers draw up a petition, while Barney Dladla attempted to open negotiations with management on their behalf. [59] When this failed, a complaint was laid against Reynolds for failing to register the works committee, interfering with a committee meeting; acting in an insulting manner, and dismissing workers unfairly. The Department of Labour, however, simply accepted management's claims that workers had embarked on an illegal strike.

At the same time, government disrupted the day-to day operation of the open unions through persistent harassment. In January 1974 four unionists (including D. Davis, H. Cheadle, D. Hemson and J. Cunningham-Brown) were banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and the police held pass raids at the NUTW's offices. In May 1974 the Criminal Investigation Department (Commercial Branch) confiscated the GFWBF's

records on the grounds that it was operating as an unregistered Friendly Society. At the end of the year the GFWBF was charged with contravening the Group Areas Act, while officials from the GFWBF and CAS were later charged and found guilty of contravening the Friendly Society Act in January 1975.[60] The GFWBF was subsequently transformed into the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in July 1975.[61] Members of the IIE also received a fair amount of police attention and in December 1974 Eddie Webster, an education officer who also who served on the editorial board of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, was arrested and detained under the Suppression of Communism Act.[62] A year later Bekisisa Nxasana, also an education officer, was detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act.

The government was successful in instilling fear amongst workers and contributed to negative perceptions of unions. In Webster's survey, respondents identified three main factors that prevented workers from joining unions. Most of the respondents, 44%, believed that it was a fear of intimidation by employers and the state that caused workers to shy away from unions. This trepidation is confirmed by a report by the NUTW in April 1975, which stated that workers were becoming afraid of playing an active part in the union.[63] In the second instance, 33% of the respondents viewed pessimism surrounding the long-term survival of the unions as the most notable deterrent. They argued that African workers tended to view unions as something alien, something for white workers, or believed that they were prohibited from taking part in unions. In addition, African workers considered themselves powerless in apartheid society and did not think that their unions were capable of bringing about change. Finally, the organisational failings of unions, especially the misappropriation of funds by organisers, also contributed to negative perceptions and 11% identified corruption as the main factor that prevented workers from joining unions.

Workers were not necessarily united in their support of unionisation and some played an active role in undermining organisation at their workplaces. The most obvious cases were informants who spied on their colleagues and reported to management. They could be rewarded handsomely for this and during Mbali's trial, for instance, one of informants

hired by the Pintex's management testified that he was paid an extra R10 a week (over and above his normal wage of R25 a week) for his efforts. Unions upset established workplace relations and hierarchies, threatening the position of *indunas* and offending some of the more conservative workers. In an interview with Mike Kirkwood, B Tshabalala[64] recalls an incident in early 1974 when a group of *indunas*, who were also union members, tried to disrupt MAWU at Non-Ferrous Metals by exposing the union to management.[65] Although they were unsuccessful, Tshabalala subsequently received a visit from security police.

In his study of stevedores in Durban, Hemson explores the contradictory position of *indunas.* Management often thought that *indunas* held some form of customary authority and appointed them to supervise other African workers and instil discipline.[66] While many workers viewed *indunas* as instruments of management and an obstacle to independent organisation, management considered them the legitimate representatives of workers and it would appear that *indunas* tended to dominate workplace committees, particularly liaison committees. With the growth of workers' organisation, however, *indunas* were wedged between increasing pressure from management to implement controls and the rising resistance of labourers.[67] Like other African workers, *indunas* feared that they would either be dismissed or that their contracts would not be renewed if they sided with workers or refused to implement management's demands. In spite of this, Hemson notes that some of the most radical workers with a clear grasp of the labour process were *indunas*. They believed that they too were exploited and threw in their lot with workers.[68]

African unions had to deal with similar difficulties in the past. Constrained in an industrial relations system specifically designed to thwart their progress and in a society geared towards disciplining and regulating African workers, African unions had not been able to set down strong roots. TUACC unions would have to come up with innovative organisational strategies to secure their long-term survival.

5.5. Strategic Alliances: the KwaZulu government and Other Unions

As noted above, one of the TUACC's key tasks was to liase with other bodies. TUACC sought to solidify the strategic alliances with the KwaZulu homeland and registered trade unions, and develop relations with local unions and international labour bodies. TUACC, however, was not in a position to dictate the terms of these relations and dealings with the KwaZulu homeland and registered unions yielded few positive results. In addition, establishing friendly relations with other locally based unions and international bodies also proved difficult.

Drawing of the strategy developed under the GFWBF, the TUACC sought to protect the open unions by entering into strategic alliances with other structures such as the KwaZulu homeland. According to the constitution, TUACC set out to '…advise Homeland governments on all matters pertaining to labour within the Republic of South Africa'; 'keep Homeland Governments informed on all developments in labour and labour organisation'; and counsel 'Homeland governments in the drafting of all legislation affecting labour.'[69] To cement the bond between TUACC and homeland leaders, Dladla was elected Chairperson of the TUACC. The selection of a political figure to such a prominent post jars with the criticisms that Left Marxists' made of SACTU's alliance with the ANC and demonstrates that notions of workers' control, especially when it came to preserving the political autonomy of workers' organisations, had not yet been fully formulated. Nonetheless, Dladla continued to prove a useful ally and went on to assist the NUTW in negotiations during strikes that took place in Pinetown-New Germany in early 1974 and, as noted in many of the accounts on the emerging unions, led a march of strikers from Clermont to Frametex.[70]

Before long, TUACC's relationship with the KwaZulu officials entered into what Maree classifies as the second phase in which the KwaZulu government withdrew its support of the open trade unions. This step was precipitated by a clash between Buthelezi and Dladla, caused by the threat that Dladla's growing popularity with workers posed to Buthelezi's position.[71] The unions were drawn into the spat after a letter written by a Mr. T.G. Dlangamandla, attacking Chief Buthelezi for failing to clarify his views on

opposition parties in the homeland, was circulated in Clermont and Durban.[72] The letter praised Dladla, and called on Buthelezi to 'inject more men of the calibre and conviction of our hero (Barney Dladla)' into the Parliament, which would prevent Buthelezi from having to 'do all the thinking and talking for KwaZulu.'[73] The letter stoked rumours and speculation in the press that unionists were involved in a plan to create a labour party, with Dladla as its leader, and that the open unions were part of a broader campaign to oppose Buthelezi.[74] At the same time anonymous pamphlets were being distributed that claimed that the KwaZulu government did not support the union movement and that certain politicians were using the unions for their own political interests.[75]

Keen to de-link the open unions from the political wrangling in the KwaZulu Cabinet, TUACC tried to explain that Daldla's links with the unions were valid. The TUACC sent delegates to meet with the Cabinet, where it was agreed that the unions would work with Mr. Ngobese, who would report directly to Dladla. The TUACC also issued a statement that denied that that Dlangamandla's letter represented the views of workers and claimed that Dladla interceded in industrial disputes with the full knowledge of the KwaZulu government.[76]

The IIE seemed even more eager to placate Buthelezi. In a statement published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* the IIE argued that it was not in the interests of workers to oppose Buthelezi because:[77]

> [h]e has fully supported the unions, and the unions know that Chief Buthelezi is their most important source of moral support, and their greatest protection against government intervention. Even if it were thought that Mr. Dladla would be even more firm in his support of the trade unions, it is obvious that the hope of making that marginal gain cannot be worth the risk of attacking a leader who has the wide support not only amongst workers but all sections of the Zulu community.

The IIE noted that the open unions had 'no desire to be manipulated by politicians', but Chief Buthelezi and his loyalists clearly held the upper hand. Dladla was subsequently

removed from his portfolio and, in spite of the calls made by TUACC to maintain and even strengthen relations, officials in the KwaZulu government rarely responded to requests for meetings and failed to provide any meaningful assistance to workers.[78]

Unionists seemed as divided as ever over the open unions' association with the KwaZulu government and failed to provide clear a analysis on the role of homelands in propping up apartheid as well as the undemocratic nature of homeland governments and traditional political structures. Some unionists, however, did attempt to extend and define the terms of the unions' association with homeland governments in more detail. For instance, in an article published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* in July 1974, Alec Erwin noted that the homelands, which were in continuous decline (providing little opportunity for internal capital accumulation or the generation of surplus and unable to attract sufficient outside investment), had become a dependent sub-system of the South African economy.[79] He argued that for the economy of the homelands to improve, unemployed workers would have to be absorbed into intensive agricultural and industrial developments and the income of rural families, especially migrants, increased. Rather than depress wages and discourage union organisation in an attempt to attract outside investment, which would ultimately decrease the wealth of the black population, Erwin urged homeland leaders to view unions as potential allies. He argued that unions could provide such leaders with organisational backing, allowing them to win more concessions from the apartheid government; assist with broader social mobilization and the education of migrants in their roles as subsistence farmers and workers; and facilitate democratic governance by encouraging popular participation.

TUACC did not fare much better with its attempts to establish strategic relations with the registered TUCSA unions. Following on from the GFWBF, TUACC affiliates hoped to develop cordial relations with sympathetic registered unions to gain access to collective bargaining structures to which non-racial and African were denied access.[80] Even before the TUACC was formed, relations with TUCSA deteriorated rapidly. The open unions found themselves in a difficult position. While keen on guarding their independence, unregistered trade unions were still dependent on registered trade unions for access to

collective barraging structures, to create cross-racial unity on the shop floor, and to gain a measure of legitimacy (and protection). As competition with TUCSA unions intensified, TUACC was forced to confront TUCSA more openly and consider in more concrete terms the role that the open unions should play in the broader trade union movement.

At the end of 1973 the tensions between registered and independent union officials in CAS were exacerbated by events surrounding another round of strikes led by the NUTW at the Frame Textile Company. During the strike the TUCSA's executive met with the Divisional Inspector of Labour and accepted his claims that management had not victimised workers and that the NUTW was driven by political motivations.[81] GFWBF delegates who attended TUCSA's annual conference in August of that year attempted to drum up support for the strike and the conference agreed to donate money to a strike fund.[82] This gesture did not mend divisions and it has been argued that a speech made by David Davis, in which he praised SACTU and criticized TUCSA, further entrenched suspicions that the independent unions were indeed political.[83]

With the formation of independent unions the need for CAS to mobilise registered unions in a drive to organise African workers fell away. Barring the TWIU, registered unions withdrew from meetings after the TUCSA conference and CAS mainly served as an administrative centre that provided clerical services (such as typing and book keeping) for the new unions. In spite of the widening divisions, some of the members in TUACC believed that the open unions were still too weak to antagonise TUCSA openly and still hoped to 'work hand in hand with registered trade unions on a democratic basis'.[84] At the same time, fears were expressed that such an arrangement would undermine the independence of the open unions and at TUACC's inaugural meeting Mbali from NUTW appealed that the 'TUACC must not let TUCSA dominate them.'[85]

There were instances where the open unions were able to work with registered unions in particular factories. The TWIU continued to work closely with the NUTW and, according to Ensor, MAWU's Pietermaritzburg branch was given a great deal of support by Mr. Norman Middleton, secretary of the registered Engineering Union. This branch of

MAWU also cooperated with the registered Boilermakers Union, which supported a campaign by the union to gain admission into the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel and Engineering industry.[86] TUCSA's executive, however, was becoming more antagonistic towards the open unions. This could be seen when TUACC organised a public meeting to protest the banning of unionists at the start of 1974 and invited other trade unions, officials from the KwaZulu government, prominent critics of apartheid, and church leaders to take part.[87] While some of the registered trade unions based on the Witwatersrand and the UTP sent messages of support, the executive of TUCSA accepted the Labour Minister's word that these unionists were banned for political activities and refused to attend.[88]

Harriet Bolton clashed with the TUCSA executive as a result and threatened to pull the TWIU out of the federation. This led to a discussion on the possible affiliation of the TWIU to TUACC, which went right to the heart of TUACC's policy on open trade unions. Much like SACTU, TUACC struggled to transcend the racial separation of workers entrenched by the apartheid government's refusal to grant African workers full industrial rights.[89] White, Indian and coloured workers would have to forfeit their union and collective bargaining rights if they joined non-racial unions and only a few Indian workers became members of the open trade unions. This meant that while the open unions challenged the formation of racially exclusive unions in principle, in practice they mainly organised African workers. The proposed affiliation of a registered trade union amplified this dichotomy, testing the understandings of non-racial unionisation within TUACC.

Two positions were developed in response to the proposed affiliation of the TWIU. The first proposed that a special section should be set up to deal with registered unions, while the second maintained that all trade unions regardless of their policies on race should be allowed to affiliate.[90] Before the matter was resolved, however, Bolton was forced to leave the union and the TWIU decided to remain with TUCSA. Harassment by the Security Police compelled Bolton to leave South Africa, which in combination with the banning of unionists, impacted negatively on the NUTW. The alliance with the TWIU

was diluted, dissolving the connections that the NUTW had established with textile and garment workers on the Witwatersrand, and plans to extend the NUTW into the Transvaal were shelved.[91]

By this time unionists in unregistered trade unions were also becoming more vocal in their criticisms of registered trade unions. In an article, published in the *South African Labour Bulletin*, Ensor noted that 'established unions' had become bureaucratic and undemocratic and argued that '[over] the years, the established unions have striven to become more acceptable to the State, and have sacrificed their independence for the admitted benefits of recognition by the State…'.[92] To counter the these oligarchic tendencies, she proposed that registered trade unions should allocate more money and time to the education of members; keep members informed; and encourage them to participate in meetings and the day-to-day running of the union.

TUCSA's worst fears had been realized with the emergence of independent unregistered unions (especially the open trade unions that were known for their militancy and were perceived to have political ambitions). In March 1974 TUCSA held a meeting for registered unions interested in unionising African workers where the General Secretary condemned the formation of independent unions in Natal and sought to woo African unions by inviting them to send representatives to TUCSA's annual conference as observers in September of that year.[93] It was largely in response to TUCSA's attempts to organise African workers again that TUACC repositioned itself and called for the formation of a national coordinating body that would unite unregistered trade unions and allow them to engage TUCSA on a more systematic basis.[94]

The TUACC tried to meet with other unregistered trade unions to win their support, but the proposal proved premature.[95] The unregistered union movement was still very fragmented and unions did not respond with much enthusiasm. Nonetheless, the TUACC aimed to influence the policies of registered unions and how they related to African workers.[96] TUACC decided to send delegates to TUCSA's conference and, along with the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), called on registered trade unions to

consult unregistered trade unions before attending industrial sittings or signing exemptions and agreements.[97] At the conference TUCSA decided to re-admit African trade unions and a few months later wrote to African unions informing them that TUCSA would be willing to consider applications for affiliation.[98] With the prospect of bringing African workers back into the federation, TUCSA did not consider it necessary to consult the independent unregistered unions on issues concerning African workers.

The TUACC also experienced difficulties in forging links with international labour bodies.[99] Problems had already been experienced in November 1973 when the IIE approached Ruskin College, an educational body based in Oxford for trade unionists. Influenced by exiles from the ANC and SACTU, the Ruskin Students Association argued that any involvement with the IIE was in contravention to the Geneva Resolution, which called for material support for the workers and people of South Africa 'through their authentic trade union and political organisations'.[100] The Association claimed that the ANC and SACTU, as opposed to the independent unions, were the true representatives of the oppressed people of South Africa.[101] The anti-apartheid movement accepted SACTU's claim that the South African state was fascist and that meaningful trade union activity inside of the country was impossible. Branded 'yellow unions', the open unions would continually be hampered as they operated in the international arena and tried to forge international cooperation.

MAWU, however, did have some success with the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF). Although MAWU's initial application was unsuccessful, the body was impressed by the Leyland strike and invited MAWU to join. A South African Consultative Committee was established, which consisted of both registered and unregistered metal unions. Tensions between MAWU and the UTP linked EAWU remained and discussions on the possible amalgamation of these unions bore no fruit.[102] Nonetheless, MAWU established relations with the registered National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) and its parallel the United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers Union (UAW), which would later prove critical in the formation of a new national federation.[103]

TUACC's attempts to forge links with local unions (registered and unregistered), international labour bodies, and the KwaZulu government proved unsuccessful. Fissures in the local trade union movement deepened as competition for African members intensified and, with the open unions labelled 'yellow unions', associations with international bodies would also be difficult to secure. In addition, TUACC had derived few advantages from its dealings with the KwaZulu government and would soon be exposed to the dangers of working with political organisation without a clearly defined political policy.

5.6. Education, Organisational Skills and Leadership

By failing to secure much needed support from outside sources, TUACC had to rely on its own strength to build a sustainable and democratic trade union movement. The new union movement, however, was constrained by a number of internal shortcomings. Many authors note that the open unions struggled to establish firm financial controls (especially without the advantage of stop-order facilities) and funds were always short. While TUACC aimed to place power in the hands of workers, structures did not always operate in the most democratic manner. The open unions had already started to develop shop stewards structures and to build from the factory floor upwards, but, with a large proportion of their membership being unskilled and lacking formal education, one of their most difficult challenges would be to develop a layer of capable worker leaders.

Friedman notes that the emerging unions were not always able to set up firm financial controls.[104] Since the open unions were not entitled to stop order facilities, organisers were responsible for the collection of membership dues. They adopted rudimentary accounting methods, often marking the payment of subscriptions off in a little book provided to members. This system was not ideal and did not only hamper the collection of dues, but in some instances organisers misused or absconded with union funds. Subscriptions did not cover costs and, unable to rely on the GFWBF to raise funds, the open unions struggled to meet the shortfall. Apart from relying on registered trade unions for access to meeting halls and on CAS for secretarial services, the TUACC responded by

pooling the resources of the unions to ensure that all affiliates had access to basic services. To overcome the desperate need for transportation, for example, the TUACC bought and made a number of vehicles available to union organisers to ferry workers to and from meetings. Nevertheless, this did not cover all the transportation needs and access to and control over these vehicles proved contentious.

The democratic structures developed by TUACC to ensure that elected worker leaders controlled the organisation did not always function as intended. The secretariat raised concerns over the lack of participation by union Branch Executive Committee representatives in meetings and organisers complained that they were not receiving proper report-backs.[105] Workers' democracy was partly held back by the difficulties related to building up a layer of confident and efficient workers leaders on the shop floor. One of the biggest obstacles was the lack of formal education. Maree notes that by 1970 41% of the African labour force had not received education at all. A mere 44% had received primary education, with almost half of these only completing their first four years of schooling.[106]

These education levels were reflected in the open unions' membership. Webster's survey indicates that 22% of the members in CWIU and 35% in MAWU had received no formal education and none of their members had proceeded beyond Form 1 (standard 8-9/ Grade 10-11). Members of the NUTW, who were more skilled, had attained higher levels of education. Only 7% had no formal education, while 48% had received some high school education and 10% had completed Form II (standard 9-10/ Grade 11-12).[107] A number of factors contributed to the higher education levels in the NUTW. Firstly, the textile industry mostly employed African women. Hemson recalls that it was generally very difficult for African women to secure work in the manufacturing sector and that they needed to attain relatively high levels of education to compete effectively.[108] Secondly, the industry preferred to hire younger workers, who were considered more adaptable to the rhythm of production. Webster maintains that younger workers received more schooling than older generations, which contributed to higher education levels in the union.[109]

For the most part, the lack of formal education meant that workers did not have the necessary organisational skills, especially when it came to bargaining and interacting with employers. Omar Badsha remembers that 'many of the shop stewards were weak, they did not have the skills…and the movement had to struggle with this.'[110] Although many had gained some organisational experience in the past (through participating in political parties, migrant associations and trade unions), they were hampered by their inability to communicate fluently in English, the language of South African business, and lacked the confidence to negotiate with management.[111] Consequently, workers became dependent on more educated unionists and Maree and Buhlungu have already highlighted the dominance of white university trained unionists in the emerging union movement. To some extent Hemson *et al* concur with their arguments by maintaining that white intellectuals predominated '…the strategic and administrative field having the confidence to squeeze concessions from management, gain knowledge of the details of statutes and agreements often crucial to solving a grievance, letter writing and meeting skills.'[112] The power of white intellectuals, however, should not be overstated and it is necessary to consider how other layers of leadership operated.

The political role of white intellectuals is complex. On the one hand they promoted democratic shop floor organisation and, as will be demonstrated, from 1974 onwards promoted a strategy of tactical engagement with employers and the state to secure industrial rights for African workers. Drawing on the examples of the British shop stewards' movement and the work of socialist thinkers such as Gramsci and Luxemburg, this type of workers' control was promoted because it was considered the most effective way in which to build a strong and radical working class movement. These ideas fed into the traditions and concerns of black workers. They had already adopted democratic forms of collective action, but were afraid of employer and state victimization and supported the move towards industrial legitimacy. When it came to more immediate political issues and structures, such as criticising homeland leaders and outlining a coherent political strategy, white intellectuals in TUACC played a much more cautious role.

Apart from an ideological commitment to workers' democracy, other factors also checked the power of white intellectuals and levelled social relations in the unions. TUACC was unable to sustain specialized posts and most unionists were drawn into the difficult task of organizing workers at some time or another. In addition, most unionists, regardless of race or level of education, did not have union experience and Omar Badsha recalls that 'none of us had experience, we all had to learn on the job.'[113] Unionists had to rely a great deal on each other and were deployed where they were needed. Pat Horn recalls that in these instances unionists often relied on those African organisers who had gained some knowledge of trade unionism through their involvement with SACTU.[114]

Many unionists have romantic recollections of social interaction in TUACC, claiming that everyone worked together, cooperated across union lines, and gladly shared human and material resources.[115] Workers generally welcomed all the assistance they could get and unionists were far too occupied with basic concerns for gender and racial difference to become contentious. African organisers, however, were not without their own influence and motivations. Contrary to Buhlungu's claim that it was only in the mid 1980s that African unionists became more assertive, a couple of conflicts took place within the open unions in the mid 1970s in which issues of ideology and the control over resources were brought to the fore. Perhaps it is not all that surprising that these contestations emanated from the NUTW, which developed a solid layer of African leaders quite early on.

Maree documents an instance where three well-established and respected organisers (who are not named) started to promote Black Consciousness ideas in the union in early 1975.[116] While John Copelyn believed that these organisers were frustrated by measures that ensured the accountability of leaders and regulated financial management, these organisers argued that white unionists retarded the progress of the union.[117] Even though their bid to change the non-racial policy of the union was unsuccessful, they were able to mobilise 'fairly extensive support' and the union lost members after the conflict was resolved. A more serious challenge came from Thizi Khumalo, also a well-regarded and popular organiser. Maree argues the conflict started to brew in mid 1974 when Khumalo

failed to submit regular factory reports, which led him to clash with BEC members and other organisers in the union. Khumalo maintained that he, an uneducated worker, was being squeezed out by intellectuals. He interpreted the conflict in racial terms and claimed that white unionists wanted to control him. Union members were drawn into the dispute, disrupting union organisation at factories such as CMC and Ropes and Matting and Khumalo was eventually reassigned to the TGWU in March 1976. Rather than resolve matters the conflict spread into the TGWU and MAWU.[118] In February 1977 TUACC took an unconstitutional decision to dismiss Khumalo, splintering the TGWU in the process, which had all but collapsed by July of that year.[119] It was only after a long and complex legal battle and a concerted drive to revive the union that the TGWU was prevented from leaving TUACC.

The uneven distribution of education and organisational skills also impacted on other layers of leadership, especially on the shop floor. According to Fanaroff, workers on the shop floor also recognised the value of having representatives who could communicate effectively in English and often voted for shop stewards purely on this basis. He recalls that:[120]

> although we went to great pains to explain at every shop steward election that you must elect the people who can represent you properly, there was, and probably still is, this belief that if somebody spoke English well they can represent you better, even if he was a liar and a scoundrel.

This tendency, he maintains, impacted negatively on the unions in the 1980s when semi-skilled workers entered FOSATU in large numbers. They gradually replaced migrant shop stewards and the unions increasingly lost touch with their migrant base.

One much more positive consequence of the desperate need for skilled leadership, which the state continuously hacked away at through banning and detentions, was that space opened up for women to take up important positions, giving rise to a layer of African women worker leaders in the unions. Nala is probably the most notable of these leaders

and was elected on the executive committee of the NUTW in 1973, became acting secretary of the union after the banning of unionists in 1974, and represented the NUTW on the TUACC Secretariat and Council.[121] Women did not only take up leadership positions in unions with a large female membership and, after her release from detention in December 1976, Nala went on to play a prominent role in MAWU and became general secretary of the union when it became a national union. Similarly, B. Tshabalala started out as a shop steward at Non- Ferrous Metals, she was elected onto the BEC of MAWU and in April 1975 she was elected chairperson of TUACC. Nala and Tshabalala would later be joined by other women leaders- such as Lindia Kompe, and Tembi Nabe (who became the second female general secretary of MAWU)- once TUACC became established in the Transvaal.

The rise of female leaders in unions with a migrant base was hugely significant. Even though authors often comment on the democratic nature of migrant organisations such as burial societies, they note that women were excluded from participating.[122] Although women leaders did experience some opposition, they claim that gender differences and inequalities within the unions did not become a central concern until the 1980s.[123] This may partly be due to the lack of gender consciousness in the 1970s, but African women were able to counter prejudices by providing effective leadership.[124] It would appear that much like migrant shop stewards, African women were also pushed out of leadership positions once the membership composition of unions shifted to include more urban-based and semi-skilled men and competition over power and resources within the unions intensified.[125]

One way in which the unions could build up organisational skills and develop leadership, especially on the factory floor, was through worker education. According to Maree, however, an intense conflict ensued over the IIE's relationship with TUACC and the content of the education it provided.[126] Maree argues that the TUACC's link to the IIE, which operated in a relatively autonomous manner, was loosened after Hemson and Cheadle, the only two union representatives on the IIE's Working Committee, were banned and not replaced. Unionists in TUACC, particularly Murphy and Copelyn,

expressed their dissatisfaction over the IIE. They believed that the IIE should be brought under union control and that the correspondence course should be replaced with a programme that served the needs of the unions and was geared towards developing BEC members, shop stewards and organisers.

Maree argues that there were also deep political and ideological divisions between intellectuals in TUACC and the IIE. Unionists not only objected to the liberal leanings of some IIE members, such as Fisher and Schlemmer, but also opposed their proposal for a diploma in Community Studies that would train black leaders in community organisations.[127] Maree argues that Copelyn and Murphy perceived the workers' struggle mainly as a class struggle and considered trade unions to be the most suitable vehicles through which to mobilise the African working class. Other issues also fuelled divisions between TUACC and the IIE and many unionists were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the IIE's close relationship with Chief Buthelezi. In addition, in December 1974 the IIE reported that it had received R15,000 from the TUC in Britain for shop stewards training.[128] Some unionists believed that the IIE needed to be more accountable to TUACC when it came to developing international relations and raising money.[129] It would take some time for these issues to be resolved and little was done to advance formal worker education in the mean time.

5.7. Refining Organisational Practices and Strategies

Aware of the many problems confronting the open unions, TUACC affiliates looked inwards and evaluated their organisational strategies and practices. TUACC, which provided a space for the open unions to discuss their shared experiences, contributed a great deal to this process. The open unions attempted to deepen decentralised organisation (giving shop stewards more responsibility); consolidated their structures; rationalised resources; and reworked and reinforced their struggle for recognition. While relations with other unions and the KwaZulu government remained strained, TUACC unions focused on organising on a national level and made some progress on establishing relations with international bodies. The TUACC unions also changed their position on

workplace committees and decided to make use of various legal avenues to defend and extend the rights of workers.

Already in December 1974 TUACC's secretariat called for an 'honest and constructive self-examination' of the organisation, arguing that 'very careful attention' should be paid to the individual policies of unions; the organisational needs of the unions; the composition and organisational problems facing TUACC; and work done in the field of worker education.[130] TUACC's constitution was amended the following year in April at TUACC's 3rd Council Meeting. One of the aims of these amendments was to intensify union participation in TUACC meetings and to facilitate communication between the Secretariat and BECs.[131] It was also noted the unions had gained a broader representation in the IIE, with more emphasis placed on developing courses and material for organisers and shop stewards.

At the same time the secretariat reaffirmed the need to struggle for the right to negotiate as a key task and that this struggle would only be successful if it was based on sound factory organisation and the demand for recognition. The secretariat's report stated:[132]

> What is important is the right to negotiate, to have stop order facilities, and to be present at industrial council meetings. We know that the right to negotiate is no right without the full participation and support of the workers. In the same way the right to negotiate will come as soon as workers in their factories are organised and demand recognition.

TUACC's relationship with TUCSA continued to get worse, but TUACC still sought to influence the policies of the registered trade unions and unite unregistered unions. In the run up to TUCSA's annual conference in 1975, TUACC called on all the unregistered trade unions to attend a national meeting to develop a common position. Such a conference would be followed by a joint conference with TUCSA to thrash out 'sore points', such as barring unregistered unions from making use of facilities at Bolton Hall.[133] At the same time TUACC condemned TUCSA's parallelism and argued that by

forcing African workers to organise along 'lines arbitrarily decided by the state and existing registered trade unions', the working class would be splintered along provincial lines and into minor industrial sections, which would undermine the bargaining position of workers.[134] Instead, TUACC argued, the trade union movement should aim to organise broad based industrial unions that were national in character. Delegates from the open unions were barred from attending TUCSA's conference, but TUACC still issued a memorandum calling for debate on TUCSA's approach to African workers and for workers to unite across the unregistered- registered divide. [135]

Once again, TUACC's call for trade union unity did not amount to much and unions seemed to become more antagonistic towards each other as they contested for hegemony by attempting to win workers over to their particular approach to trade unionism. Nonetheless, TUACC was forced to clarify its objections to parallel unionism and increasingly recognised the urgency of transcending provincial and narrowly defined sectoral boundaries by building a trade union movement that was united on a national level. The NUTW had largely been unsuccessful in extending into other provinces and it was MAWU that spearheaded the creation of open national unions. In November 1974 MAWU attempted to organise the Leyland plant in Elandsfontein on the East Rand.[136] This move was met with strong opposition from the state, leading to the detention and interrogation of a Johannesburg based activist, Pindile Mfethi. Nevertheless, MAWU established relations with the newly formed Industrial Aid Society (see next chapter) that proved instrumental in setting up a MAWU branch in the Transvaal.

Some progress was also made on the international front. A product of the global economic crisis, which was starting to transform the social and economic order, the emerging unions were out of step with the ideological distinctions and organisational loyalties generated by the Cold War.[137] Much like the other trade unions that were emerging in other industrialising countries at the time, the open unions were confronted with the authoritarianism of their own state and did not identify or want to associate with the Soviet Union. Union movements in countries such as Poland and Brazil would later

provide inspiration[138], but since they were also in their formative stages could not provide the open unions with the necessary support.

Short of international allies, the TUACC accepted assistance from the ICFTU for donations to cover the transport costs of shop steward meetings and an organiser's salary.[139] This was not an easy decision to make as the ICFTU was anti-communist and any association with this body would further entrench the claims made by SACTU that the emerging unions were conservative unions tied to the apartheid state. Declining subscriptions coupled with the difficulties surrounding the GFWBF eroded TUACC's independent resource base and TUACC decided to approach international organisations such as the ICFTU for support. However, unionists in TUACC did not want to follow the same line as the UTP by coming dependent on the ICFTU for its existence and stressed the need to remain autonomous from outside influences.

TUACC and the open unions struggled to come to terms with their relationship with the KwaZulu government. Two important shifts were starting to take place, however. Firstly, in the new constitution there was no mention of homeland governments and a clause was included that outlined a broader social role for TUACC and the open unions. The TUACC now aimed to '…secure social justice for all workers…to secure a decent standard of living, social security and fair conditions…' for members and the working class as a whole.[140] The focus on social and political rights (as opposed to specific political organisations or alliances) is reflected in the material published by the *South African Labour Bulletin*. In July 1974, for instance, the journal published the ICFTU's Migrant Workers' Charter that called for migrants to be paid wages equal to those of nationals; accorded social rights (such as housing, medical and welfare benefits); and be given the right to join unions without the fear of expulsion for resisting authoritarian regimes.[141] The editors, many of who were tied to TUACC, also commented on and published articles that critiqued government spending; the labour bureaux; rising unemployment; rural poverty; state repression and called for the right of workers to associate freely.

In the second instance unionists appeared more willing to confront KwaZulu homeland officials. In TUACC's last attempt to engage the KwaZulu government the open unions presented a memorandum to Buthelezi at an IIE certificate-awarding ceremony in August 1975.[142] In addition to the usual requests for support, the memorandum called for the official recognition of unions that organised public workers employed by the KwaZulu government. [143]

Unionists, however, were caught off guard when Buthelezi responded by urging the unions to join Inkatha, revived in March of that year. This marked the beginning of what Maree considers the third phase of the open unions' association with KwaZulu as politicians now attempted to influence the labour movement through populist parties. Inkatha was a popular organisation and grew rapidly, claiming a paid up membership of 120 000 by September 1977. Maree speculates that the TUACC did not want to alienate union members, who he argues widely supported Buthelezi. Webster's survey, for instance, reports that 87% of union members regarded Buthelezi as their leader. [144] Badsha confirms that a substantial number of workers supported Inkatha and regarded Inkatha 'as the embodiment of the ANC, the ANC incarnate'. [145] There were, however, workers that were more critical and Webster's survey indicates that many of the younger workers did not view Buthelezi as a true *worker* leader.[146] Unionists were divided on the issue and the TUACC took some time to make a decision and the cooperation with Inkatha remained unresolved until 1978. In so doing intellectuals once again failed to provide decisive political leadership on this issue.

Much like the NUTW at the start of 1974, TUACC's other affiliates also tightened up their organisational strategies. Increasing emphasis was placed on shop stewards, who could recruit workers from inside the factory, and the development of shop steward structures that could assist with the administration and day-to-day running of the union. In 1975 the TGWU reported that of the 25 factories the union was trying to organise, 16 already had functioning shop stewards groups.[147] The report noted that, 'a major problem in starting the shop steward groups has been to make workers understand that the union is almost powerless unless workers unite and organise within their places of work…the

shop steward groups where this is understood have proceeded with vigour and a sense of direction.'[148]

At TUACC's 4th Council Meeting in August 1975, MAWU concurred that the mass drive for membership was no longer suitable and reaffirmed the need for decentralised organisation based on devolving responsibilities to shop stewards, who were expected to recruit, organise members, and collect subscriptions. [149] This would require the on-going training of shop stewards, which had now become the key task of organisers and union officials. MAWU also noted that the union also aimed to rationalise resources by focusing on a few carefully selected factories.

The CWIU expanded decentralised organisation and in August 1975 reported that the union's resources were focused on supporting existing shop stewards groups and officials feared that the union would soon loose touch with those workers in factories that had 'not as yet reached the stage of throwing up their own factory leadership'.[150] In order to combat this problem the CWIU aimed to set up a general Saturday forum for workers and maintained that the development of 'locals' constituted the next logical step in the union's development. Similarly, the TGWU and the NUTW were already discussing the need to unite shop stewards across factories through the creation of shop stewards councils.[151]

At TUACC's 4th Congress all of the unions noted that, in spite of the latest changes to the IIE, courses and material were still not suitable for the training of shop stewards.[152] The IIE was subsequently transformed into an education sub-committee and placed under the direct control of TUACC affiliates.[153] In spite of the very limited success - all of the unions still identified the struggle for recognition as their main task. Responding to a call made by MAWU, TUACC decided to launch a national campaign for the recognition.[154] This campaign was not confined to the factories and unionists drew up a petition that was circulated in townships and beer-halls.[155]

A new aspect of the open union's strategy was also in the making – and the open unions reviewed their boycott of participating in work-place committees. At the beginning of 1975, for instance, the NUTW decided to use a management controlled liaison committee to gain a foothold in Feltex and campaign for recognition.[156] The open unions, however, initially struggled to combine their participation in such industrial structures with in-depth factory organisation. This seems particularly true of the CWIU and at AE&CI organisers entered negotiations with management without including the rank and file.[157] The union was unable to make effective gains and members soon became disillusioned with the union. Similarly, MAWU also attempted to make use of the liaison committee at Defy to advance the recognition of the union, but was unable to effectively contest the management's attempts to alter the bonus system and 19 of the workers who led the opposition to the new production bonuses were dismissed.[158]

In addition to participating in industrial structures, the open unions extended their fight against employers into the courts. Due to encouragement from the NUTW, the TUACC set up a permanent legal committee to help unions prepare cases.[159] The committee, which was expected to make regular report backs, dealt with a variety of issues ranging from Workmen's Compensation, UIF payments; assault cases; and overtime payments.[160] In February 1975 the NUTW defended workers that were charged for striking illegally at ITMA and, after some delay, all 110 workers that were charged were either acquitted or had the charges against them dropped.[161] Reflecting TUACC's focus on social justice it was proposed that the unions should also launch a campaign to oppose Section 29 of the Bantu Urban Areas Act, which sought to deport pass offenders deemed 'undesirable' or 'loafers' to camps in the homelands for a two-year period to learn a trade.[162]

TUACC affiliates aimed to strengthen their structures and refined their tactics in order to secure their long-term survival, but the greatest challenges were still to come as employers and the state stepped up their opposition against unregistered trade unions. This intensification of hostilities was already evident in MAWU's dealings with Conac Engineering in September and October 1975 over a dispute related to overtime that resulted in the lockout of workers.[163] Worker representatives were chased away when

they tried to report the lockout to the Department of Labour and they were also prevented from meeting workers because they were followed and filmed by security police. Officials from the Industrial Council also refused to divulge any information on any exemptions or agreements on overtime in the industry to workers and their representatives. Conac was clearly concerned about losing experienced workers and when dismissed workers registered as work seekers at the Department of Bantu Administration they were told that they would be endorsed out of the area if they did not accept reemployment at the company. Maree claims that the dispute was significant because it demonstrated that '…three state departments, Labour, Police and Bantu Administration, as well as the Industrial Council were all opposed to MAWU.' [164]

At the same time the NUTW experienced one of its most devastating defeats at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills after a two-week strike by Indian and African workers.[165] The company, which had replaced a relatively benevolent personnel manager with the brother of Natal's head of security police, dismissed all the strikers and called in 200 police. This broke NUTW's base at the factory, which was one of the union's strongest plants.

5.8. Conclusion

Between 1974 and 1975 the TUACC unions had to come to grips with the various difficulties associated with unionising black workers in apartheid South Africa. As the economy slowed down, the open unions had to face opposition from employers and managers, who went to great lengths to undermine independent worker organisation (through the use of lockouts, dismissals and redundancies) and aimed to thwart any demands for recognition and instil discipline through the introduction of liaison committees. Similarly the state, which colluded with employers to undermine the new unions through various departments, continually harassed unionists and workers. Economic recession, victimization by employers and state repression all served to disrupt the day-to-day organisation of the unions. The optimism that emanated from the strike wave was squashed and workers became fearful of associating with unregistered trade unions once again.

TUACC's strategic alliance with the KwaZulu government also bore little fruit. Just when it appeared that unionists were willing to challenge officials by calling for the recognition of unions in the public sector, Buthelezi invited the open unions to collaborate with Inkatha. TUACC failed to provide decisive leadership on the issue, but from April 1975 committed the new union movement in Natal to fight for social justice for workers and political rights such as the freedom of association.

With the exception of the TWIU, relations with registered trade unions also became strained as TUCSA decided to form African parallels. TUACC, nonetheless, tried to unite the unregistered trade unions and started to place more emphasis on building on a national scale. In spite of the negative perceptions of the emerging union movement internationally, TUACC was able to establish relations with overseas bodies such as the ICFTU and MAWU affiliated to the IMF. While the unions accepted donations from these organisations, which relieved the lack of financial resources, they were determined not to loose their independence.

At the end of 1974 TUACC recognized that there were a number of organisational weaknesses within the open unions that needed to be addressed. A core of workers leaders, which included a group of extremely capable African women leaders, had emerged from the open unions, but for workers' democracy to thrive administrative power had to be handed over to shop stewards. This would not be an easy task as many union members, which had not received much formal schooling, lacked the skills and confidence and were hampered by their inability to communicate fluently in English. In addition, most unionists were also inexperienced, which led to poor organisational practices and tactics that excluded the rank and file from negotiations with management and undermined in-depth factory floor organisation. Education was key, but TUACC and the open unions complained that the education provided by the IIE was not suitable for shop stewards or organisers.

Structures were tightened up within TUACC and each of the open unions re-assessed their organisational strategies. Spearheaded by the NUTW, the unions placed more

organisational responsibilities in the hands of shop stewards, while organisers were expected to provide them with training and continue to rationalise resources by concentrating on a few carefully selected factories. The possibility of forming broader shop stewards councils was also mooted. The commitment to fighting for recognition remained steadfast, although the ways in which to achieve recognition became more flexible. Some unions experimented with using liaison committees to gain a foothold for a recognition campaign and TUACC launched a broader campaign that was not exclusively focused on the factories to popularise the demand for recognition. To bolster this struggle the open unions also began using the courts to push back employers.

By the end of 1975 Webster's survey indicates that while 34% of TUACC's members joined unions to secure benefits and 7% hoped to improve wages, the majority (59%) signed up to defend the rights and dignity of workers.[166] The open unions had made very few gains by the end of 1975 and would not show much progress in 1976. It was largely this commitment to fight for workers rights that held the unions together.

Notes: Chapter 5

[1] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 148.

[2] For a brief history of TUACC See HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. Background Document Presented by the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of Trade Unions, April 1977.

[3] HP: AH1999: B6.3. Report of the Secretariat to the TUACC Council Meeting, 16 June 1974.

[4] HP: AH1999: B6.1. Minutes of the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council, 11 January, 1974.

[5] HP: AH1999. B4.1. Secretariat Report, Council Meeting for the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council, 16 June 1974.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] HP: AH1999. B1.Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council Constitution.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. Background Document Presented by the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of Trade Unions, April 1977.

[11] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 276.

[12] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 161 and L. Ensor, 'A Look at the Open Trade Unions,' in *SALB*, 1 (3): June, 1974, p. 47.

[13] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 164- 165.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 205 and L. Ensor, 'A Look', p. 46.

[16] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 205- 207 and L. Ensor, 'A Look', p. 47.

[17] L. Ensor, 'A Look', p. 47.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 146, 266 and L. Ensor, 'A Look', p. 52.

[20] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 265.

[21] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 146-147

[22] L. Ensor, 'A Look', p. 49.

[23] HP: AH 1999 B12.2.1.1. A Brief History of the TUACC Unions' Relationship…

[24] HP: AH 1999: B4.1. Minutes of the TUACC Council Meeting, 16 June 1974.

[25] D. Hemson *el al,* 'White Activists', p.258.

[26] D. Hemson *el al,* 'White Activists', p.258; HP: AH1999 B12.2.1. A Brief History of the TUACC Unions' Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliates and Unregistered Trade Unions, 14/5/1975.

[27] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 245; HP: AH1999: B6.1. Minutes TUCSA Council Meeting, held 16 June 1974.

[28] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 245.

[29] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p 246.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] D. Hemson *el al,* 'White Activists', pp. 274- 277.

[32] HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 16 June (continued on the 23 June 1975).

[33] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report to the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, August; Report to the Fourth TUACC Meeting, August 1975 – by MAWU.

[34] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 161.

[35] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 161-162.

[36] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 216.

[37] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 252- 254.

[38] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 270.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Webster defines unskilled work as jobs requiring only a few days introduction, including tasks that are essentially repetitive mostly involving manual effort (such as general labourers). Both 'lower' and 'higher' semi-skilled jobs are defined as positions requiring the acquisition of elementary skills which the worker exercises on his own, but have little scope for initiative and are characterized by the use of simple check lists. The difference between these categories lie in the type of work and lower semi-skilled positions require less skill and experience, with many workers in this category still

classified as learners. The jobs in the lower semi-skilled category include mechanic or artisan attendants, office messengers, machine operators (learners), plant greasers; inexperienced production assemblers; and *indunas* or persons in charge of unskilled workers. Higher semi-skilled work consists of drivers, experienced production assemblers and overseers in charge of unskilled or lower-semi- skilled workers.

[41] E. Webster, 'A Profile' p. 48.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] A. Hirsh, 'An Introduction', pp. 3- 16.

[45] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 220, 253.

[46] A. Hirsh, 'An Introduction' p. 12- 16.

[47] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 162.

[48] Comment, 'A Managerial Choice' in *SALB*, 3 (8): October 1977, pp. 1-5.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] K. von Holdt, *Transition from Below: forging trade unionism and workplace change in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2003.

[51] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 88 and Durban Editors, 'Case Study: the functions, nature and effectiveness of the Statutory Liaison Committee- Pintex,' in *SALB*, *2* (9 & 10): May-June 1976. For examples see the case of Eskom in L. Ensor, 'Recent Strikes,' in *SALB*, 1 (4): July 1974, p. 51-52.

[52] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 55.

[53] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 119.

[54] Magistrates Court, Natal Division (Durban, November 1973- Jan 1974). Mbali, who was accused of inciting an illegal strike was found guilty, fined R75.00 and six month jail sentence suspended for 3 years.

[55] Durban Editors, 'Case Study: the functions, nature and effectiveness of the Statutory Liaison Committee- Pintex,' in *SALB*, *2* (9 & 10): May-June 1976. For examples see the case of Eskom in L. Ensor, 'Recent Strikes,' in *SALB*, 1 (4): July 1974, p. 52.

[56] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 208.

[57] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 175-176.

[58] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 160.

[59] L. Ensor, 'Reynolds; Scene of a Struggle,' in *SALB*, 1 (3): June 1974, p.37.

[60] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 267.

[61] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 265.

[62] Comment, 'The state and the freedom of association,' in *SALB*, 2 (9& 10): May-June 1976, pp. 8-10.

[63] HP: AH1999: B5.1.2. NUTW Report to the TUACC Council Meeting, 6 April 1975.

[64] Also spelled Shabalala in the minutes of the TUACC see HP: AH1999: B4.3. Minutes of the Third TUACC Council Meeting, 6 Aril 1975.

[65] M. Kirkwood, 'A Conversation', pp. 56-57.

[66] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp. 576-577.

[67] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 626.

[68] D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness'. p. 624.

[69] HP: AH 1999: B1. Constitution of the Trade Unions Advisory Co-ordinating Council

[70] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. Report on the Relationship with the KwaZulu Government in the Past.

[71] Alpheus Mthethwa, interview by NU, February 2003.

[72] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. Report on Relationship with the KwaZulu Government in the Past; HP: AH 1999: B12.4. copy of letter sent to *Ilanga Lase Natal, the Weekend World, Natal Mercury, Daily News, Sunday Times,* RE: 'Reported Clash in the Kwa Zulu House of Assembly, John Dlangamadhla, n/d.

[73] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. copy of letter sent to *Ilanga Lase Natal, the Weekend World, Natal Mercury, Daily News, Sunday Times,* RE: 'Reported Clash in the Kwa Zulu House of Assembly, John Dlangamadhla, n/d.

[74] See Comment, 'Clarification: trade unions and KwaZulu Politics,' in *SALB*, 1 (3): June 1974, pp 3-5.

[75] HP: AH 1999: B4.1. Minutes of the TUACC Council Meeting Held on 16 June 1974.

[76] TUACC, 'The Statement Made by the TUACC and the KwaZulu Cabinet,' in *SALB*, 1 (3): June 1974, p. 8.

[77] Comment, 'Clarification: trade', p. 4.

[78] HP: AH 1999: B6.3. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 12/8/74; HP: AH 1999: B12.4. TUACC Memorandum (KwaZulu) n/d; HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 23 June 1975; HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. Report Meeting Between KwaZulu and the TUACC Delegates on Wednesday 17 March 1976 at Ulundi.

[79] A. Erwin, 'Suggested Strategies for Rural Development,' in *SALB*, 1(4): July 1974,. pp. 31-41.

[80] HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. Background Document Presented by the Trade Union Coordinating Council (TUACC) to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of Unions, April 1977.

[81] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Unregistered Unions, 14/5/75.

[82] R3600 versus R600 HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975) Maree argues that the donation was R3500.00 (J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 155).

[83] HP: AH1999. B12.2.2.1. A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Unregistered Unions. 14/5/75; J. Maree, 'An Analysis of'', p. 149.

[84] HP: AH 1999: B6.1. Minutes of the Trade Union Coordinating Council, 6 January 1974.

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] L. Ensor, 'A Look', pp. 46-52.

[87] HP: AH 1999: B6.1. Minutes of the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council Meeting, 4 February 1974. B6.1.

[88] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975).

[89] SACTU, which was comprised of both registered and unregistered unions, had confronted similar concerns with the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act (1956). The proposed entrenchment of racial segregation within registered unions stimulated much debate over registration. Registered affiliates ultimately proved

unwilling to compromise their status and, rather than form non-racial unions with no rights, chose to register under the Act and continue to provide as much support as possible to African unions by raising their concerns in the bargaining structures to which they had access.

[90] HP: AH 1999: B4.1. Minutes of the TUACC Council Meeting, 16 June 1974

[91] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1. Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on 23 March 1977 to Discuss the Possible Formation of a New Union Federation.

[92] L. Ensor, 'The Problems of Established Trade Unions, ' in *SALB*, 1 (3): June, 1974. p. 14.

[93] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975).

[94] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975.

[95] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975).

[96] HP: AH 1999: B6.1. Minutes of TUCSA Joint Secretariat Meting, held 9 October, 1974.

[97] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.1. ' A Brief History of the TUACC Union's Relationship with TUCSA, TUCSA Affiliate Unions and Registered Unions.' (14 May 1975); HP: AH 1999: B6.1. Minutes of TUCSA Council Meeting, held 20 September 1974; NUTW's support of TUACC's demands seems out of step with the general orientation and practice of the union. The union was led by Lucy Mvubelo, who has been described as politically conservative, and in April 1975 the SALB criticized her for supporting promises made by Grobbelar (TUCSA) and Niewoudt (Confederation of Labour) to support the Minister of Justice in stopping communist infiltration into trade unions. (see Comment, 'Red Herring Rides Again,' in *SALB*, 1 (10): April 1975, pp. 4- 6).

[98] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.3. Trade Union Council of South Africa Circular No. 28/25.

[99] HP: AH 1999: B1. Constitution of the Trade Unions Advisory Co-ordinating Council.

[100] HP: AH 1999: B12.5. Ruskin College and the Institute of Industrial Education: an analysis.

[101] HP: AH 1999: B12.5. Ruskin College and the Institute of Industrial Education: an analysis.

[102] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', p. 209.

[103] D. Hemson *et al,* 'White Activists', p. 291.

[104] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today,* p. 90.

[105] HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat Meeting, held 9 February (1975?); Minutes of the TUACC Meeting, 12/3/1775.

[106] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p.100.

[107] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 49.

[108] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[109] A. Hirsh, 'An Introduction to' p. 8; E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 49 estimates that 31% of the NUTW's members were between the ages of 20-29 and 41% between 30-39 years.

[110] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[111] Hemson, D. *et al,* 'White Activists', p. 259.

[112] Hemson, D. *et al,* 'White Activists', p. 259.

[113] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[114] Pat Horn, interview NU, February 2003.

[115] Pat Horn, interview NU, February 2003 and Chris Bonner, interview by NU, February 2003.

[116] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 167 –170.

[117] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 168.

[118] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 272- 274.

[119] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 274-280.

[120] Bernie Fanaroff, interview by NU, August 2003.

[121] Reprint of press release 'Profile of Junerose Nala,' in *SALB*, 2 (9 & 10): May/ June: 1976, p. 117.

[122] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 133.

[123] Chris Bonner, interview by NU, February 2003; Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003; Tembi Naba, interview by NU, November 2004.

[124] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[125] *Ibid.*

[126] J. Maree, 'The Institute for Industrial Education and Worker Education,' in *SALB*, 9 (8): July 1984.

[127] J. Maree, 'The Institute', p. 82.

[128] HP: AH 1999: B.4.2: IIE Report to TUACC, 1 December 1974.

[129] Mike Murphy, interview by NU, February 2003.

[130] HP: AH 1999: B4.2. Secretariat Report, 1 December 1974.

[131] HP: AH 1999: B4.3. Secretariat report to 3rd TUACC Council Meeting, 6 April 1975.

[132] HP: AH 1999: B4.3. Secretariat report to 3rd TUACC Council Meeting, 6 April 1975.

[133] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.2. Background Paper on TUCSA for TUACC Council Meeting prior to going to TUCSA conference, by Ravi Joshi, August 1975 and Memorandum Submitted to the 21st Annual General Conference of TUCSA by the Affiliates of the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC), 23 September 1975.

[134] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.2. Background Paper on TUCSA for TUACC Council Meeting prior to going to TUCSA conference, by Ravi Joshi, August 1975 and Memorandum Submitted to the 21st Annual General Conference of TUCSA by the Affiliates of the Trade union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC), 23 September 1975.

[135] HP: AH 1999: B12.2.2.2 Memorandum Submitted to the 21st Annual General Conference of TUCSA by the Affiliates of the Trade union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC), 23 September 1975 and Statement Submitted to the 21st Annual General Conference of TUCSA By the Affiliates of the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council, 23 September 1975.

[136] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 209.

[137] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 290.

[138] ' A Look at the Labour Movement in Brazil,' *FOSATU Worker News*, No. 24, September 1983; 'Solidarity: the workers struggle in Poland,' *FOSATU Worker News*, No. 25, October 1983.

[139] HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. Minutes of the Meeting of the TUACC Secretariat, 16 April and 23 April; HP: AH 1999: B6.1. Minutes TUCSA Secretariat Meeting, held 4 June 1974.

[140] HP: AH 1999: B1. Amendments (24 March 1975).

[141] ICFTU, 'Migrant Workers' Charter: the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions,' in *SALB*, 1 (4): July 1974, pp. 42-48.

[142] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p 351.

[143] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. TUACC Memorandum (KWAZULU) (n/d).

[144] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 62- 63.

[145] Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1992.

[146] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 64 and Omar Badsha, interview by DH, December 1998.

[147] HP: AH 1999: B4.3. Secretariat report to 3rd TUACC Council Meeting, 6 April 1975 and Report to TUACC of the Transport and General Workers Union (n/d).

[148] HP: AH 1999: B4.3. Report to TUACC of the Transport and General Workers Union.

[149] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report to the Fourth TUACC Meeting, August 1975. (MAWU).

[150] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report to TUACC of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, August.

[151] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report to TUACC of the National Union of Textile Workers, August 1975.

[152] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report to TUACC of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, August; Report to TUACC of the National Union of Textile Workers, August 1975; Report to TUACC of the Transport and General Workers Union; Report to the Fourth TUACC Meeting, August, 1975 (MAWU).

[153] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Minutes of the 4th Council Meeting, 24 August 1975; S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 96, 98; and J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 345.

[154] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. MAWU Report to 4th Council Meeting of the TUACC, 24 August 1974; B4.4. 4th Council Meeting of the TUACC, 24 August 1974.

[155] HP: AH 1999: B4.5 Minutes of the Extraordinary TUACC Council Meeting, 26 October, 1975.

[156] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 177-178.

[157] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 247-248.

[158] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 210-212.

[159] HP: AH 1999: B43. Minutes of the Meeting of the TUACC Secretariat, held 16 April and 23 April 1975.; HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Secretariat Report to the 4th TUACC Council Meeting.

[160] HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.2. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat meeting, 16 June 1975 and 23 June 1975.

[161] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Report of the NUTW to 4th Council Meeting of the TUACC, 24 August 1974.

[162] HP: AH 1999: B4.4. Minutes of the 4th Council Meeting, held 24 August 1975.

[163] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 212-215 for dispute.

[164] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 215.

[165] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp 188-190.

[166] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 52-53.

Chapter 6:
TUACC and the Formation of National Unions, 1976- 1978.

6.1. Introduction

From 1975 onwards MAWU worked closely with the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) in Johannesburg and managed to make inroads into the Witwatersrand, leading to the introduction of the workers' control tradition in the region. Even though the open unions had revised their strategies and seemed ready to advance, 1976 was a particularly bad year for the emerging unions, which Friedman describes as '…a year of total gloom, lightened only by occasional flashes of disaster'.[1] State and employer repression intensified, especially following the 1976 student uprising, and disrupted unionisation. Even though the TUACC and the IAS-MAWU failed to respond to the uprising, the urban revolt and emergence of open political resistance not only prompted state reforms, but also created a politically astute layer of future union members.

From 1977 the open unions started to recover, although organisation would still prove arduous. TUACC's expansion onto the Witwatersrand was consolidated with the establishment of national unions, while affiliates attempted to mobilise support from international unions to augment the struggle for recognition. Union representatives were also more careful when they took part in industrial structures such as works and liaison committees and aimed for the maximum participation by shop steward in plant level bargaining.

6.2. The Industrial Aid Society, MAWU and the Heinemann Strike

MAWU's initial attempt to branch out onto the Witwatersrand by organising workers at Leyland's East Rand plant was met with strong opposition. From March 1975 the union found an ally in the newly formed Industrial Aid Society (IAS), which would provide the TUACC unions with crucial support. The IAS, a worker centre, started much later than the WPWAB in the Western Cape and the TUACC in Natal and activists were deeply divided on which of these two organisation to model themselves. Once the IAS aligned

with MAWU, the organisation contributed a great deal to the development of the workers' control tradition.

The IAS started out as a project of the Wage and Economic Commission, which operated under NUSAS at the University of the Witwatersrand. The Inaugural Meeting of the Steering Committee was held in December 1973 and, according to Maree, the IAS aimed to improve conditions of African workers and promote a sprit of self-sufficiency.[2] To achieve these aims the IAS set up a legal advice centre and complaints service. An education and literacy programme was also developed.[3] There was even talk of establishing a medical and dental clinic for workers.[4] Founding members included Jeanette Curtis (later Jeanette Schoon) and students such as Steven Friedman, chair of NUSAS at the time. Curtis was well connected to the ANC underground and invited a people to participate, including Pendile Mfeti (described by Friedman as one of the leading intellectuals in the IAS) and Miriam Sithole (from SACTU) to join.[5]

As noted previously, SACTU and other Congress structures had an ambivalent relationship with the new union movement in the 1970s. Tensions between the emerging unions and SACTU in exile were already starting to emerge (as seen in the case of Ruskin College), but there were locally based Congress activists who supported the IAS. For instance, Friedman recalls that Eli Weinberg gave the IAS a donation, which he viewed as a token of support from the SACP.[6] According to Friedman, however, the SACTU members in the IAS '…had very specific roles, which everyone kind of knew about but did not discuss upfront.' They were there to give the IAS legitimacy and '…to make sure that [Congress] 'Movement' kept tabs on us'.[7]

In spite of this seemingly strong SACTU connection, older SACTU unionists were not that influential. Friedman explains that:[8]

> they were not all that successful in controlling anything. When it came to gut strategic things, everybody was immensely polite and differed entirely, but then did what they wanted to do anyway. The old guard types were powerless to stop

> them because this was a new ball game. They were used to being the trade union wing of the nationalist movement, with no particular prospect…of getting bargaining rights from anybody or being in any real industrial bargaining situation and suddenly they were sitting with people who were strategising how you got the employer to bargain with you. This was not stuff they that knew terribly much about. So they didn't have terribly much influence…

Division between the SACTU stalwarts and radical students was further entrenched by the way in which the IAS was structured. Older SACTU activists all served on the Steering Committee of the organisation, but radical students in the education group carried out the day-to-day running of the organisation. These students borrowed ideas from both TUACC and WPWAB. For instance, the IAS wanted to set up a benefit scheme similar to that of the GFWBF, but used the WPWAB's constitution as a guide.[9] This did not mean that activists successfully combined these approaches and they were at loggerheads when it came to general versus industrial trade unions.[10] Worker education also became contentious and, as Maree points out, those in favour of WPWAB's approach argued that general trade unions were inherently political, but without guidance could fall pray to reformism. Workers' education, therefore, should ensure that workers developed the appropriate level of consciousness before trade unions developed.[11] Consequently, the IAS decided not to affiliate to the IIE on the grounds that it did not approve of the separation between organisation and education and questioned 'the value of workers receiving diplomas recognised by employers.'[12]

Maree is critical of the IAS's early organisational strategy. He claims that instead of building up solid factory organisation, the IAS enlisted the support of students to pamphleteer a wide range of factories all over the Witwatersrand.[13] Perhaps Maree is too harsh in his criticism in that other workers centres started out in a similar manner. Unlike TUACC in Natal, which was bolstered by the mobilisation of workers during the 1973 strike wave, it has been argued that unionisation in the PWV region proved slow and difficult. In his study of metal workers on the East Rand, Sitas also writes about the unwillingness of particularly urban workers to join unions.[14] Both of these factors,

however, do not account for the growth of other African unions in the region. By 1976 the UTP had already printed and circulated more than 20,000 Workers Calendars, a popular educative tool that provided accessible information on trade unions and industrial relations, and had assisted in the revival of three older African trade unions and the establishment of seven new unions.[15] In 1973 the UTP unions had already started to unite under the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU), which included parallel unions affiliated to TUCSA.[16]

By the time the IAS was formed the UTP was already contributing to the formation of a moderate mainly urban working class organisational culture that partly grew out of a variety of Christian churches and was based on gaining a sense of respectability by establishing an ordered industrial relations system that would allow more skilled workers to bargain with employers and participate in decision making on a friendly basis. This approach was based on the analysis developed by Loet Douwes Dekker, previously assistant general secretary of TUCSA and founding member of the UTP.[17] He argued that, as African workers became more skilled, employers would no longer be able to dismiss workers involved in collective action as easily.[18] Management would be compelled to abandon their unitarist approach (the paternalistic notion that the workplaces should function as one big happy family) and would have to accept conflict as a natural part of industrial relations. Both workers and managers, therefore, should work towards the introduction of reforms that would ultimately lead to the regulation of industrial conflict.

In addition to rejecting the UTP's policy on black leadership, activists in the Wage Commission and IAS, '..felt that the UTP was reformist, conservative, [and] they didn't want to get rid of capitalism.'[19] Although the IAS was still in the process of debating which approach it should adopt, there was already a sense that the IAS would promote a more radical alternative.

The IAS lagged behind the UTP, but was able to advance gradually. Within three months, between April to the end of June 1974, the IAS' membership had increased from eight to

132; the number of complaints referred had risen from 11 to a 130; and participants in the literacy class expanded from three to 30.[20] By the beginning of July, 15 workers were taking part in the Saturday training program.[21] The complaints service served as a main contact point and in many instances workers would lay a complaint as a group. This provided the opportunity for further organisation and meetings were held with these workers, who were encouraged to form factory committees at their workplaces.[22] On 10 August 1974 the IAS held its first general meeting with workers from 49 different factories.[23]

Maree also condemns the IAS for focusing on workers who worked in central Johannesburg and lived in Soweto. He maintains that Soweto was historically more difficult to unionise and, unlike the East Rand that was working class in character and included large hostels for migrants, Soweto was more dispersed and culturally and politically heterogeneous.[24] Once again, Maree's criticisms appear unfounded and Sitas argues that the IAS made contact with metal workers on the East Rand early on.[25] At the IAS' first general meeting, for example, it was reported that 99% of workers came from the East Rand and only 1% from Soweto.[26] According to Sitas, by September 1974 the IAS claimed a membership of 325 and had also made contacts with numerous metal factories – including GKN Rockwell, Metal Box, Leyland, Main Tin, Dunswart Iorn and Steal, Pearsons, Teal and Westvaal.[27] By establishing a base amongst especially migrant metal workers on the East Rand the IAS would start to resemble TUACC in Natal and the IAS became increasingly distinct from the UTP.

Members of the IAS, however, did not believe that they were making enough progress, which they partly attributed to organisational weaknesses, and towards the end of 1974 members of the education sub-committee called for the IAS to be restructured.[28] A central concern was the undefined relationship between the education group and the Steering Committee, which was not functioning properly. The Steering Committee was seen as a token body – which mainly served as convenient 'façade of black initiative'- that simply ratified the decisions of the education group.[29] To overcome this structural imbalance both sections were incorporated into a central executive.

Maree argues that this reorganisation entrenched the domination of students and academics in the IAS, who mainly focused on intellectual debates and impeded the creation of democratic working class organisations.[30] This was not necessarily the case, however, and the restructuring of the IAS facilitated TUACC's expansion into the Transvaal and further developed workers' control in important ways. Firstly, power relations were upset, which ultimately allowed the pro-industrial trade union faction to gain the upper hand and develop closer links with MAWU. At the suggestion of Mthethwa, who attended a IAS meeting in March 1975 where he indicated that MAWU was willing to sponsor the salary of an organiser, the IAS executive decided to set up 'union structures in the field of metal' and appointed temporary office bearers for the union.[31] This fuelled a bitter conflict within the IAS and as a compromise, mediated by Philip Bonner, it was decided to form a 'metal wing' instead.[32] In so doing it was agreed that the formation of a union would be delayed until five functioning shop steward committees had been established and a deputation would be sent to TUACC to discuss possible points of disagreement in approach and strategy.

At the end of April the metal section reported that contacts had been made with workers in several new factories (including General Erection, Consol, Mckechnie, Wolhuter Fry Metals, Mitchell Cotts, French Engineering, Metal Rolling, Gallops) and meetings were being held with workers from Leyland and Heckett.[33] By June the metal wing and representatives from MAWU had also established a coordinating committee as a forerunner to a national union.[34] It is interesting to note that the metal wing revised the IAS's initial strategy of recruiting workers outside the factory gates and tried to organise workers through 'home visits' and meetings held in townships, which were far removed from the watchful eye of employers. The initial success of the metal section fed tensions within the IAS. Activists fought over financial controls, the accountability of sub-committees and, perhaps most importantly, the establishment of a metal versus a transport and general union.[35] Matters came to a head at beginning of July 1975 and those activists who favoured the WPWAB stance on general unionism resigned.[36] This allowed

for the organisation of metal workers to begin in earnest and for relations with MAWU and TUACC to solidify.

In the second instance, the concentration of academics in the IAS allowed for more in-depth reflection on the meanings of workers' control and activists incorporated ideological discussions into worker education. Material from the IIE was not devoid of political analysis, but was more practical in approach and dealt with issues such as industrial relations, the rights of workers, and the economy and IIE workbooks included topics such as profit, growth, investment, wages, and productivity.[37] The education group in the IAS, on the other hand, added broader theoretical topics such as labour history, economics, law (including the pass laws and the position of migrants), and politics (that dealt with the contemporary political function of Bantustans and debunking political myths) in their curriculum.[38]

With the resignation of pro-WPWAB students, a group that was much more critical of union alliances with national organisations and wanted the workers' movement to remain politically independence rose to prominence. While this group of activists, identified as Phil Bonner, Bernie Fanaroff and Taffy Adler, have been accused of trying to control the political development of the IAS by preventing activists aligned to Congress Movement from gaining any influence, activists linked to the Congress movement continued to participate in the organisation.[39] For instance Sipho Kubheka, who became a full-time organiser in the metal section, had links to the ANC underground.[40]

Through the development of MAWU on the Witwatersrand the IAS started to develop a worker base. With the assistance of Gavin Anderson, Sipho Kubheka as well as Pindile Mfeti, MAWU established a strong presence at Heinemann towards the end of 1975. The organisational practices that were developed by workers at Heinemann were truly remarkable and reflected workers' control in practice. Workers were recruited carefully into an organising committee, which held regular meetings and participated in the broader factory meetings held on Saturdays, and decisions were referred back to departments in the factory.[41] It was decided not to approach management for recognition

until 75% of the factory was unionised. By January 1976 the union had set up a shop stewards committee and signed up 484 of the 606 African employees.[42]

'Baba K', a worker who later became an organiser in MAWU, recalls how the workers at Heinemann were organised[43]:

> We then heard that there was this union called MAWU. The union made it clear that the union would not just come in and represent the workers. It was not separate from the workers, but it was the workers themselves …It was then that we realised that we wanted the union to organise us and we also started to organise ourselves inside the factory in what you may call a very deep way of organising. You must remember that at that time we could not organise openly because we were afraid of being kicked out- fired, you know. We used to meet in Tembisa to organise workers or to try and explain to workers what the function of the union is. By March 1976 management had heard that there was a union operating in the plant at Heinemann. That is when they tried to do away with us. But we had faith then- faith in ourselves as part of the union. We knew that because there were many of us, we were strong.

On 25th March the company dismissed 20 workers under the guise of redundancies.[44] Workers demanded an explanation from management and called for MAWU to be recognised. The extent to which workers organised themselves outside of the factory is also noteworthy. Workers were divided up into area committees and held a number of meetings to discuss the way forward over the weekend.[45] On Monday 29 March workers met in front of the company gates, only to be violently dispersed by the police, and all the strikers were subsequently dismissed.[46] Twenty-eight people had to be treated in hospital and MAWU laid charges of assault against the Minister of Police.[47]

Anderson claimed that the strike was a victory. Workers demonstrated that they were willing to stand up for trade union rights, regardless of the pressures from the state and employers, and that the state had to come to terms with the unions for African workers.[48]

Even though the Minister settled out of court, paying R21,000 in damages to each injured party, MAWU organisers (Sipho Kubheka and Gavin Anderson) were charged for inciting an illegal strike. Contrary to Anderson's assessment, the dispute proved a tremendous setback for MAWU. While unionists were tied up in a court case, up to 200 workers, including some of the most active union members such as Baba K, were dismissed, leading to the collapse of MAWU's branch at Heinemann.[49] Baba K recalls that 'we were really believing that as we were so united, management can't do away with us' and the Heinemann strike highlighted that, in spite of building a solid and democratic base, unregistered trade unions were still very weak because they had no bargaining rights.[50]

The brutal response of the police at Heinemann was indicative of the intensification of opposition to unregistered trade unions. State repression continued and in May 1976 more unionists – including June Rose Nala, Obed Zuma, Phindile Mfeti and Miriam Sithole - were detained.[51] This would mark the end of Mfeti's union activity. He was held for 366 days and was 'deported' to Butterworth in the Transkei in July 1976.[52] On his release, he was banned and placed under house arrest, but subsequently disappeared and it is believed that he was killed by death-squads.

6.3. The Emerging Unions and the 1976 Student Uprising

The 1976 student uprising transformed the political landscape of South Africa and quickened the pace of open political resistance to the apartheid government. Barring the WPWAB, the emerging unions did not seem to recognise the significance of this urban revolt. While large numbers of workers went on to support the students' struggle, the unions themselves did not play a significant role in the revolt and failed to provide any leadership or direction for workers during the uprising.

Against a background of increasing economic hardship and unemployment and a under-resourced and authoritarian local government administration and education system, secondary school students in Soweto, who were influenced by the ideas of the BCM, organised a march on 16 June to protest against the introduction of a new language policy

that required half of examinable subjects to be taught in Afrikaans. Violent clashes between police and students transformed the protest march into a full-scale riot, which quickly spread to townships in other parts of the Transvaal and the Cape.

The student uprising entered into a second phase when the SSRC in Soweto called on workers to support a series of political strikes (or stay-aways). The first strike took place on the 4-8 August and two-thirds of the African workforce in Johannesburg and Pretoria stayed at home.[53] The second stay-away, called for the 23-26 August, was even more widely supported. Hirson claims that up to 80% of workers heeded the call and Hemson *et al* note that the police estimated that 430 000 workers stayed away on the first day and 320 000 on the second and third days.[54] This stay-away, however, was marred by violent clashes between hostel dwellers and residents in Soweto. After a mysterious fire at the Mzimhlope hostel (in the Meadowlands area) on the morning of the 24 August, a group of enraged hostel-dwellers stormed through the adjacent sections of the township and attacked houses and residents.[55] Residents organised to defend themselves and by nightfall a number of street battles between hostel-dwellers and residents had erupted. Such skirmishes continued into the following week.[56] The police and individuals from the Urban Bantu Council were subsequently implicated in stoking up the conflict, but Glenn Moss argues that the very nature of hostels, which operated as separate institutions, laid the basis for these clashes.[57]

Moss claims that hostels set two processes in motion.[58] Hostels dwellers were physically separated from other residents, which limited social contact and entrenched antagonistic stereotyping between the two groups. At the same time, hostels created the potential for mobilising hostel dwellers as a group for collective action. There are a number of problems with Moss' assessment. In their study of Kathorus, for instance, Bonner and Nieftagodien note that there was a fair amount of social contact between hostels and townships and they argued that in the 1960s and 1970s '[r]elationships between township residents and hostel dwellers are recoded almost universally as being 'cordial', good', and 'very good.'.[59] The only long standing grievance that hostel dwellers had was that they were targeted by criminal township youths who robbed them of their hard earned

wages. Even Moss acknowledges that similar conditions existed in Soweto and residents and hostel dwellers united in 1975 to boycott beer in response to a price increase.[60]

Moss is correct in pointing out that municipals hostels could facilitate collective action, but such action was not necessarily inward looking. Even though municipal hostels were highly regulated by police (called 'black jacks'), they were not as strictly controlled as closed compounds and workers were able to make wider connections, which could aid political mobilisation on a wider scale. In the 1940s Pedi migrants were able to establish contact with others from Sekhukhuneland, hold meetings, and organise beyond the hostel.[61] In the 1980s the unions organise workers through the hostels and many hostels became FOSATU strongholds.[62]

The factors that facilitated the clashes in Soweto appear more straightforward than Moss suggests. Hirson claims that the demands of students did not resonate with migrants and hostel dwellers. He argues that:[63]

> The slogans of the Revolt were meaningless to them, and they were more likely to find the closing of schools incomprehensible. Education, for many of them, was still a prized object they failed to attain. The unemployed youth, on the other hand, were (or appeared to be) the *tsotsis* they hated and feared as pay-day predators.

This highlights David Lewis's argument that community organisations and protests often focused on the grievances of permanent township residents and failed to take up the issues effecting squatters and migrants living in hostel complexes.[64] This, he maintains, excluded a large portion of the working class from community organisation and hampered union-community relations.

Migrants and hostel dwellers were given little opportunity to relate to students' demands. This was mainly because student leaders failed to consult them before they made the call for the stay-away and there were indications that groups of students accosted and intimidated strike-breakers, especially during the first stay-away on the 4 August.[65] In

addition, unionists did not counter the contradictory leadership provided by politicians such as Buthelezi. Unlike the WPWAB in the Cape, the emerging unions in the Transvaal were silent on the question of the urban revolt. The IAS-MAWU did not respond officially and the UTP, which was approached by Soweto students, reaffirmed its position on 'no political involvement' and did little to support the uprising.[66] The only exception was the NUCW, led by Lucy Mvubelo, which came out in support of students.[67]

The student protests spread into Natal much later than other parts of the country and TUACC may have been too far removed from the upheaval to respond adequately. On the Witwatersrand the IAS-MAWU were devastated by the Heinemann defeat and further disrupted by the upheaval in the townships- especially since they relied a great deal on township meetings and home visits to make contact with workers. Perhaps the Black Consciousness tones of the student protests also repelled unionists. Nevertheless, without the unions taking a stand on the uprising, workers were left to look to students or traditional leaders and homeland politicians for guidance.

Many authors contest the claims that it was only Zulu workers who were behind the violence, but Buthelezi was one of the most outspoken homeland leaders and the only one to became directly involved in the stay-away. His leadership on the student revolt was inconsistent at best. Before the stay-away, Buthelezi objected to the destruction of schools and educational equipment and issued a call for 'the establishment of vigilante groups to protect Black property against political action', warning radicals to watch out for a backlash from more 'responsible' elements in the community. He also criticised the 'arrogance of young people who think they know what's best for people.'[68] After the clashes, however, Buthelezi addressed hostel dwellers in Soweto on the 27 August and called for calm and the cessation of hostilities.[69]

The SSRC soon called for another political strike from the 13- 15 of September. This time students consulted more widely and met with spokesmen from the Mzimhlope, Inhlazane and Dube hostels. This stay-away was the most successful yet and was widely support by workers in Soweto. On The 15th of September 200,000 mostly coloured

workers in Cape Town joined them.[70] This was followed by another successful stay-away by workers in Tembisa and Hirson argues that 'the industrial complex at Isando was empty on Monday the 20 September.'[71]

Most unionists remember the 1976 uprising as a time when union organisation was severely disrupted. They were also unable to escape the harsh repression that came with the government's attempts to quell the student uprising. Storey Mazwembe from the WPWAB paid the ultimate price and died a few hours after being taken into detention.[72] In November a 'slew of trade unionists were banned: from the WPWAB, Elijah Loza, John Frankish, Debbie Budlender, Judy Favish, Jeremy Baskin, Willie Hofmeyer and Graeme Bloch; from the FCWU, Wilma van Blerk; from the UTP, Loet Douwes-Dekker, Eric and Jean Tyacke; from the IAS, Chris Albertyn, Gavin Anderson, Jeanette Curtis, and Sipho Kubheka, and from the TUACC, John Copelyn, Pat Horn, Alpheus Mthethwa, Mike Murphy and Moses Ndlovu.'[73]

The repression of popular resistance would remain a prominent feature of apartheid South Africa, but from the mid to late 1970s the government sought to abandon direct coercion in favour of limited political and institutional accommodation in order to stabilise the country economically and stem growing political uncertainty.[74] Friedman claims that the move to reform came more from the need to defuse the political unrest unleashed by the 1976 student protests than the emergence of the new unions.[75] Others maintain, however, that it was the combination of industrial unrest in 1973 and the growth of unregistered trade unions together with the political turmoil in 1976 and growing international criticism of apartheid that precipitated government reforms.[76] Horn argues that the government was terrified that workers and students would unite and Bonner writes that: '…after the urban uprising of 1976- the threat of the politicisation of strike action was much feared if no effective trade union rights were to be granted- a prospect all to real, as the 'class of 76' began to enter the factories.'[77]

Government reform was heralded by the appointment of two key Commissions, including an enquiry in into labour legislation and regulations under Prof. Nicholas Wiehahn in

1977 and into the 'utilisation of manpower' (urbanisation and influx control) under Dr Piet Riekert. The recommendations proposed by the Wiehahn Commission would have far reaching implications for trade union organisation in future, but in the meantime the government sought to amend the LRA. The Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Amendment Bill (1976) removed the preference accorded to liaison committees and allowed for the election of a works committee irrespective of the existence of a liaison committee.[78] Works committees were allowed in smaller establishments (with less than 20 workers), while employers with more than one plant in an area were able to set up a liaison committee covering all of their establishments and the formation of industry committees, comprising of a number of liaison committees and works committees in any given trade, were sanctioned.[79] Members of industrial committees were allowed to attend Industrial Councils when African wages and working conditions were discussed (but were given no voting rights) and employers could enter into agreements with Industrial or Regional Bantu Labour Committees, which, if approved by the Minister, were legally binding. The limited right to strike remained, but agreements between employers and Industrial or Regional Bantu Labour Committees could place further restrictions on strikes in certain trades or industries.[80] Finally, the Bill permitted Africans to serve on the Central Bantu Labour Board and Africans could also be appointed as chairs of Regional Councils and Bantu Labour Officers.[81] These amendments were not enacted, but demonstrated that the government was still committed to the development of a dual labour relations system and no provision was made for the registration of non-racial and African trade unions.

Baskin notes that, in spite of the relative weakness of the emerging unions, their struggles were making an impact on business. He maintains:[82]

> unions were causing employers problems with their campaigns for recognition. Companies were loosing production and profits in an effort to avoid relatively straightforward union demands. A few leading employers began to argue that some accommodation could be made.

In November 1976 the country's top business leaders met to set up the Urban Foundation, which would seek to improve conditions in the townships and promote the extension of property rights in order to promote stability.[83] Friedman argues that while the UF did not offer any immediate gains for workers, it gave the government's reform strategy new momentum. The role of employers should not be overestimated, however, and most remained set on sidelining the emerging unions and would only make concessions when forced to do so. After 1976 employers, nevertheless, became sensitive to growing international criticism and hurriedly adopted a string of 'codes of conduct' in 1977 to promote an image of good practice and fend off calls for disinvestments. These included the Sullivan Code adopted in February, the EEC Code in September, and the SACCOLA Code in November.[84] As the editors of the *South African Labour Bulletin* pointed out, however, these codes failed to recognise unregistered unions.[85] In addition, the editors maintained that racial discrimination in the workplace could not be addressed within the current system of apartheid, which was propped up by a system of labour allocation that operated through influx control and the labour bureaux.

Many authors note that when the 'class of 1976' entered the labour market they brought a new assertiveness and confidence with them.[86] There was, however, a delay before this generation joined the TUACC unions. To the frustration of many unionists, large numbers of politicised youth left the country to join MK and the ANC underground, robbing the workers' movement of a whole layer of potential leaders.[87] On the Witwatersrand many of the urban youth that did become involved in the union movement were initially attracted to the UTP unions, which mainly organised semi-skilled workers and promoted black leadership. For instance, Bafana Ndebele, who is still a committed unionist in the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), first signed up with EAWU. Ndebele was later drawn to the militancy of the FOSATU unions and remembers that 'Moses Mayikeso would say, if you join MAWU I will not come to your factory if there is not strike.'[88] In the early 1980s Ndebele played a crucial role in bringing a section of workers in the EAWU over to MAWU.

The 1976-generaton brought a fierce commitment to political education with them. Ndebele remembers that his generation focused on activities that would 'empower them' and prepare them for national liberation. There was little time for recreation and he recalls that:[89]

> we did not see a reason why we should play soccer while we were not liberated, while we were not yet free…most of the time you spent time either at home, with friends, or church, and then the union, and these meetings, these evening meetings…Your parents couldn't tell that you were going to a meeting, You tell them that you are going to bioscope, you are not going to discussion groups. You come back late.

Both government reform and the unionisation of the 1976-generation would have a significant impact on TUACC in the late 1970s and FOSATU in the early 1980s. According to Bonner, the move towards reform and the appointment of the Wiehahn Commission encouraged unions to unite under FOSATU in anticipation of new labour legislation.[90] Although these reforms mainly served to regain political control, space was opened up for the trade unions to expand substantially. The participation of the 1976-generation in the workers' movement, on the other hand, reflected significant changes that were taking place in the membership composition of the open unions that would form FOSATU as increasing numbers of semi-skilled workers signed up and heightened political discussion in the unions.

6.4. Local Factories, National Organisation and International Solidarity

By the end of 1976 the TUACC unions were in a poor state, but from 1977 the TUACC renewed attempts to consolidate and strengthen factory organisation. The struggle for in-depth factory floor organisation and the struggle for recognition remained central, but was bolstered by attempts to win the support of internationally based unions.

At the end of 1976 the survival of the TUACC unions in Natal were in jeopardy. The detention of June-Rose Nala and Obed Zuma in May 1976 caused serious disruptions in

the NUTW and Maree claims that the union experienced a severe slump until the end of 1976.[91] Largely due to the support offered by TUACC officials and the establishment of local committees, the NUTW was able to retain a presence in the Pinetown area and was making inroads into Hammarsdale.[92] MAWU was at the verge of financial and organisational collapse; the TGWU was ripped apart and paralysed by internal conflicts; and the CWIU had made few gains.[93]

The TUACC was also experiencing a number of difficulties. Adequate BEC participation in Secretariat meetings was still lacking, which meant that union secretaries were left to make decisions on their own and officials acted without mandates.[94] Locals had been established (which allowed affiliates to pool resources by sharing offices at Jacobs, Pinetown, Durban and Pietermaritzburg), but were still ad-hoc in that no constitutions had been adopted for such structures by October 1976.[95] The production of a workers newspaper was irregular and while meetings were held with the IAS in Johannesburg, discussions with the WPWAB failed to take place after virtually all of their organisers were detained during the student protests in Cape Town.[96]

The fight for recognition had largely been unsuccessful and the NUTW and MAWU had experienced significant defeats at Cotton, Wool and Textiles and Conac Engineering. In addition the Natal unions struggled to use the existing industrial relations machinery to their own advantage and often their participation in industrial structures undermined strong factory floor organisation and union democracy. With the help of TWIU the NUTW challenged an exemption granted to CTM by the Industrial Council on overtime restrictions for women workers. Union organisers, however, dominated negotiations with the regional and national Industrial Council and the campaign became separated from the rank and file and organisers failed to understand the demands of their members.[97] Thus, while organisers were successful in preventing the company from renewing its exemption on overtime, which meant that overtime would be pegged at ten hours a week, workers wanted overtime to be restricted to 13 hours a week. Officials later admitted that they were too focused on winning the issue than using overtime as an issue to organise and mobilise workers.[98]

Other open unions did not have the same level of access to Industrial Councils, but they soon learned that working through works and liaison committees posed similar difficulties. Workplace committees were designed to limit independent organisation and curtail the bargaining power of workers and workers were often frustrated when committees failed to win any significant gains. The limitations of union participation in works and liaison committees were highlighted by CWIU's struggle at Natal Chemical Plastics (NCP) and Revertext.[99] One interesting aspect of the union's approach at NCP was that works committee representatives tried to gain some degree of autonomy from management and expand the constitution to compel management to meet with the whole executive instead of just the chairperson.[100] Management responded by establishing a liaison committee in its second plant (the 'North plant'), which was used to introduce a 5c an hour increase, and simply refused to have anything to do with the works committee's executive other than the chairperson. The works committee declared a dispute, but both management and the Department of Labour were unsure of how to respond to the workers' demand for a works committee constitution.

Management agreed to meet with a more representative grouping of worker leaders and allowed day workers to leave company premises during lunchtime.[101] Just as it appeared that the works committee had made some headway, management went on the counter offensive. Unionists were victimised and management interfered with the election of works committee representatives. In one instance management even threatened to deduct workers' pay if the committee failed to find out who was responsible for the theft of a few yarns of bobbin and beer cartons.[102] According to Mawbey, an organiser for the CWIU, this strategy had enabled the union to sustain a campaign against management for a time, but there were few concrete advantages for workers and this strategy had '…led workers to misconceive the struggle. They became caught up in committee affairs, neglecting the overall union struggle.' [103]

Shop stewards at Revertex, adopted an innovative approach and used the works committee to spearhead a campaign around the Factories, Building and Machineries Act,

in which workers actively participated by drawing up a memorandum that listed the breaches of health and safety regulations.[104] Management was subsequently forced into making improvements and providing workers with safety equipment. Nevertheless, Maree maintains that the works committee subsequently failed to find other issues to mobilise all workers around and did not make much progress in the fight for union rights.[105]

Organisation in the Transvaal also floundered. Maree argues that in spite of the creation of worker controlled structures at factories such as Heinemann, tensions emerged between the white members of the IAS and organisers in MAWU.[106] While the members in the IAS were committed to workers' control, Maree argues that they struggled to relinquish power and the union was split between MAWU organisers who controlled internal affairs and IAS members who managed external matters such as fund raising. [107]

In September 1976 a bridging committee- the Council of Industrial Workers on the Witwatersrand (CIWW) that was made up of the IAS executive and the BEC of the union- was formed to resolve these divisions.[108] This new coordinating body also aimed to facilitate the extension of other TUACC unions into the province and establish closer links between the IAS and the IIE.[109] The CIWW adopted similar principles to those of TUACC and sought to promote non-racism through the formation of open trade unions; workers' democracy; and the sharing of resources (offices, transport, running costs, education and legal aid) amongst affiliates [110] The organisational strategy of the open unions in Natal was promoted and the CIWW confirmed that unregistered unions needed to rely on intensive factory organisation to build up the strength and unity required to force employers into negotiation.[111] Education was also considered a key component of this strategy and a report by the CIWW noted that:[112]

> While African workers have had unions for decades, there is no well-established tradition of organisation particularly among migrant workers. Many factory workers are illiterate or semi illiterate and most are not functionally numerate. In

> order to ensure real participation by members in their union, both at the factory and in the union offices, a lot of intensive training and education is needed…

Even though the union representatives were assured majority representation on the CIWW, officials in the IAS maintained a great degree of control.[113] Maree argues that it was only after unionists were banned in November 1976, allowing members from the IAS to become active participants in the union, that hostilities subsided. One of the factors that contributed to these tensions was that MAWU and the IAS failed to use their legal campaigns to mobilise workers or build the union. The IAS was asked to assist with legal matters relating to the Heinemann case, but MAWU organisers complained that the union and their members were being isolated from the process. [114] This meant that lawyers were making decisions for the union, which undermined workers' control and placed decisions in the hands of outside experts.[115]

The CIWW experienced many of the same difficulties that the TUACC unions were dealing with in Natal. Chris Bonner remembers that:[116]

> You would organise secretly- you get workers to meetings, you build regular contacts, workers recruit other workers- it is all underground. You meet outside the factory, we had an office, we met in peoples' homes and in the township, or whatever. You build strength on the shop floor and you elect shop stewards *etcetera*… Once you get to the point of approaching management that's when the trouble really began, because in that point in time management would then victimise workers nine times out of ten. Or you never got to the stage to approach management and …you would struggle to maintain organisation because in fact you were not really able to do anything. And then we were collecting subs by hand. So what would happen is that workers would always pay when they joined and then may pay a month subscription and then gradually you would have problems to …collect the money. So it was quite a tough time. It was very much a rolling membership I would say at that stage. It was totally unstable and really, really difficult to actually secure. We couldn't really because of the management.

> There were odd occasions and breakthroughs. Generally it was very difficult to get to the stage of going and doing anything for workers.

From 1977 the TUACC and the CIWW concentrated on rebuilding the open unions. They relied on their strategy of in-depth-factory-floor organisation and adopted measures to ensure that campaigns for union rights were based on rank-and-file participation. Unions cooperated at the local level, sharing resources and organisers, and, at the same time, consolidated on a national level. In addition, the open unions developed a new strategy of mobilising international support for recognition.

Nala and Obed Zuma were eventually released from detention in December 1976. Together with John Makatini and Willies Mchunu, Nala went on to rebuild MAWU. Organisation was re-established at Scottish Cables and Sarmcol in Pietermaritzburg; Non-Ferrous Metals and Ferdo in Jacobs; and Glacier Bearings and Natal Die Casting in Pinetown.[117] In February 1978 it was reported that MAWU concentrated on building up factory leadership and had not expanded to any new factories, but the union proposed that TUACC affiliates should consider the creation of a local committee in the Richards Bay area.[118] The union continued its struggle for recognition at Glacier Bearings. In so doing MAWU ensured that the rank and file and shop stewards were included in all aspects of the struggle. Organisers refused to negotiate with management without shop stewards being present and mobilised workers to collect affidavits when the union challenged the legal status of the liaison committee.[119]

In June 1977 the CWIU reported that the only functioning shop steward group was based at NCS Plastics, although the union was organising Revertex and Total in Jacobs and Henkel Adhesives in Isipingo- Prospection.[120] The union continued to encourage works committees to adopt their own constitutions, which the management at Revertex and Total rejected and the Department of Labour provided draft specimens for works committees to model their constitutions on. In February 1978 the union noted that a 'French Subsidiary' (probably Total) had recognised the shop stewards committee as the works committee, which was able to secure a few small victories (including the issuing of

pay slips and the installation of a wash basin). [121] The union soon discovered that works committees did not have much legal power and the union's preoccupation with the constitutions of such committees had not proven effective. From the beginning of 1978 the union concentrated on gaining recognition from Revertex and in September shifted attention to Henkel SA, a subsidiary of Henkel West Germany. The CWIU won a partial victory early in 1979 when Henkel's management agreed to recognise the union, but only as representative of its members, and allowed shop stewards elections and meetings to take place at the plant. [122] These victories were short lived, however, and management subsequently formed a 'Company Council' that covered all the workers at the plant with the aim of undercutting the union. [123]

TUACC prioritised rebuilding TGWU, which was in turmoil. The TUACC Secretariat reported that by July 1978 the TGWU had established a stable BEC and that Industrial Sector was developing well in Durban. Organisation was much slower in Pietermaritzburg, but subscriptions were stable and one factory was well organised. [124] In October 1978 the general sector was transformed into the TUACC Workers Project, which aimed to provide benefits, legal aid and education to unorganised workers and encourage them to form committees to deal with group complaints and establish trade unions. [125] The TUACC Workers Project also made contact with workers at Rainbow Chickens, which undertook a number of stoppages in 1979. [126]

The most potential for growth was on the East Rand in the Transvaal- the heart of the metal and chemical industries. In June 1977 the CIWW reported that MAWU was holding regular meetings with 11 factories (mostly in the Benoni, Isando, and Kew) and had opened branches in Benoni and Kew. [127] Membership and subscriptions were up, several stable shop steward groups and BECs were in operation, and plans were afoot to establish a local in Benoni. [128] By the end of the year the CIWW drew up a plan that estimated potential union growth and identified the areas that would be targeted in future. These included: Kew/ Wynberg, which consisted of light and general engineering and chemical establishments and drew on workers from Alexandra, Tembisa and Soweto; Benoni/ Boksburg, which consisted of the largest concentration of metal companies on

the Witwatersrand and employed workers from Natalspruit and Vosloorus; and Isando/ Spartan/ Elandsfontien, home to many foreign owned engineering companies and the centre of the chemical industry, with workers coming from Tembisa, Daveyton, Natalspruit and Soweto. Heriotdale/ Clevaland and Denver/ George Goch/Jeppe were also considered viable and mainly served the engineering and food industries. [129]

MAWU (Tvl.) made some progress at Vosa Valves (a Stewards and Lloyds company) where management accepted the union as one of the legitimate channels of communication and agreed to meet with shop stewards. [130] Maree argues that MAWU was also on the verge of signing a recognition agreement with Tensile Rubber, but first had to develop shop stewards during 1979 before the opportunity was exploited. [131] A great deal of emphasis was placed on teaching shop stewards about industrial legislation. Education was mostly provided by the IAS, which held Saturday morning classes and produced a range of practical guides such as 'Understanding Payslips' and a booklet on sick pay, maternity benefits, and UIF. [132] The CIWW had also started a health and safety programme and appointed a medical officer to assist with this work. [133]

The CIWW also attempted to prevent the separation of unionists from legal processes and proposed that legal matters should be included in worker education and that a procedure should be adopted whereby the legal committee would conduct the necessary research and submit all the legal opinions to the unions. [134] Any case that was perused would be discussed and monitored in joint MAWU-IAS meetings. In October 1976 TUACC's legal committee reported that quite a number of industrial cases had been dealt with, most of which were settled out of court, and that the TUACC and CWIU aimed to set up a joint Legal Defence Fund to raise funds for legal cases rather than expect individual unions to carry the cost. [135] It was essential for the rank and file and shop stewards to be involved at all levels of organisation to prevent officials from being separated from members and specialists from dominating decisions.

In February 1977, concerns were raised at a joint TUACC and CIWW meeting that MAWU had not been transformed into a national trade union. [136] TUACC wanted to avoid

the mistakes made by the NUTW, which had made contacts with textile workers in Johannesburg but failed to formalise the relationship.[137] The creation of a chemical union in Johannesburg was under consideration and the meeting resolved that both MAWU and the CWIU should become national unions.[138] Drawing on the policies of the TUACC, it was decided that the branches of these national unions should share the same policies and that the regional branches of MAWU should elect sub-committees to discuss a constitution for the new national unions.[139] The establishment of national unions brought the relationship between the TUACC and the CIWW as well as the IAS and the IIE into question. Consequently it was proposed that all of these bodies should unite into one national body, preferably under the TUACC.[140]

In May 1978 the new draft constitution for the national TUACC was circulated and a month later the CIWW and TUACC merged. The National and Regional Executive Councils of the TUACC were elected on the 30 July 1978, while the National Executive of MAWU was confirmed and Regional Committees were established by the CWIU, NUTW and the TGWU.[141] In spite of the initial proposal to extend the chemical union to the Transvaal, the CIWW proposed that it would be more beneficial for the TGWU to become the next national affiliate.[142] Maree claims that this was largely in response to a debate between intellectuals who called for the formation of industrial trade unions, and worker representatives wanted to see the formation of a general union because they believed that the union movement should be concerned about all workers and not just workers from a particular industry.[143] The TGWU's Transvaal branch was founded in November 1978 and Lydia Kompe was appointed as the organiser.[144] The industrial sector of the new branch prioritised recruiting workers in the chemical industry and, like the Natal branch, the general sector was transformed into the 'TUACC Worker Project'. The TGWU soon made contact with workers at Reef Chemicals, Dunlop and Transvaal Coffin and workers from Pick n' Pay and Rubenstien Plastics were referred to the TWP.[145]

As the unions started to stabilise in the Transvaal a group of confident worker leaders started to emerge in the factories and took charge of the day-to-day organisation of the

union. A number of these worker leaders, such as Baba K, who were victimised and dismissed for their union activities, and became organisers. For instance, Petrus Mashishi, longstanding president of SAMWU, became involved in organising workers in the TWP.[146] Perhaps the best example is Moses Mayekiso, who was chairperson of the shop steward council at Toyota and lost his job during a strike. He first volunteered to work for MAWU and was subsequently employed to organise in the Wadeville area.[147]

Even though the education sub-committee failed to develop a comprehensive programme, organisers undertook the education of shop stewards, which was quite successful since they were involved in organising and understood the issues that shop stewards had to deal with. Pat Horn explains:[148]

> Well, the IIE started off being a correspondence course. There was a big discussion about whether that was the most appropriate way to do education. There was a big push for more face-to-face education, in the factories, in those factories where workers were being organised…. So they used to produce little booklets, you know, 'How to be a Good Shop Steward', 'How to Form a Works Committee' and negotiation handbooks. There were little booklets for shop stewards. Mainly that because there were no specialised trainers in those days, we all as organisers used to get together and plan courses using our own common sense. There wasn't much of the kind of adult basic education training that there is these days. You know, later on we had all sorts of other methods of doing things. We used to say to ourselves, we shouldn't lecture so much, but in fact there wasn't such a well-developed system of adult education. So we used a combination of rather traditional skills of standing and giving boring lectures, and sometimes we used to do group work if we were more creative. It was pretty much up to us as organisers. The advantage of having it like that was that the people who did the facilitating were also involved in organising, so they actually understood the issues.

Drawing on a strategy originally developed by the CWIU, MAWU focused on organising foreign owned companies, which were more sensitive to international criticism and called on the support of other unions that organised the same company in different parts of the world. In March 1976 the secretary reported that 'MAWU had used overseas pressure in an attempt to gain union recognition in Leyland' and that this tactic eventually forced Leyland management to accept the election of a shop steward group during working hours.[149] MAWU stressed, however, that '…there was a danger of using outside foreign pressure to win union recognition as this may encourage workers to rely on this outside pressure rather than relying on their unity within the factory.'[150] Finding international allies would still prove difficult. For instance, MAWU's international publicity campaign at Glacier Bearings was less successful, mostly because SACTU tried to dissuade British shop stewards at Glacier Bearings from visiting South Africa.[151] Even though the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) did send a representative and shop stewards at Glasgow and Kilmarnock supported MAWU demands, the AUEW's district committee backed SACTU.

The NUTW, which concentrated on organising Smith and Nephew, received two harsh blows in 1977. Firstly, after the student uprising and banning of unionists, Norma Daniels, general secretary of the TWIU, attempted to distance the registered trade union from the NUTW and TUACC. The long-term cooperation between the NUTW and the TWIU at Smith and Nephew allowed workers to unite across the racial divide. Maree notes that Indian workers were angered by Daniels' actions and the entire TWIU's membership at the plant – which included 60 Indian workers - resigned and joined the NUTW.[152] Secondly, it has been speculated that the company came under pressure from the government and sought to use the divisions between the NUTW and TWIU and in May 1977 management indicated that they would not renew the recognition agreement and aimed to transform the shop steward committee into a statuary works committee.[153] The NUTW launched an international campaign to pressurise management into signing a new agreement, but it was not until the NUTW targeted unions that organised the British section that Smith and Nephew agreed to re-negotiate the agreement.[154] A new recognition agreement was eventually signed in September 1978.

By this time the TGWU had embarked on a recognition campaign at Frobo-Krommenie, a subsidiary of a Swiss multinational. The company deployed a number of methods to break the union – including a lockout of workers and the dismissal of unionists for trivial offences.[155] In this instance Dutch and Swedish workers took up the TGWU's recognition campaign, but the company proved intransigent and for much of 1979 management attempted to force the union to work through and accept the 'Works Council'.[156]

TUACC played a prominent role in assisting affiliates. In February 1978 a decision was taken that any donations to unions would be channelled through TUACC, which would allocate funds to all affiliates, and in March a policy relating to the employment of organisers and volunteers was formulated.[157] Locals had become an effective organising tool and at the beginning of 1978 the possibility of establishing new locals in Prospecton/ Isipingo, Richards Bay and Hammardale was considered.[158] Finally, the joint Legal Aid Committee funded numerous cases (dealing with the prosecution of strikers, dismissals, and victimisation of unionists) and sought legal opinions on the status of the Smith and Nephew recognition agreement; the constitution of works committees; and compared the Factories Act to the Industrial Council Agreement for the Iron, Steel and Metallurgical Industries to find inconsistencies.[159] The contracts of migrants were also investigated, with the aim of understanding the liability of employers when they breached the contract and the service benefits of workers.[160]

By the end of 1978 the unions in TUACC were still weak. The open unions, however, had made some progress in their struggle for recognition and their focus on in-depth factory organisation under a soundly organised umbrella body such as TUACC laid a solid foundation for future expansion.

6.5. Conclusion

MAWU's extension onto the Witwatersrand marked the introduction of the workers' control tradition in the region. The IAS was initially dominated by white intellectuals, but gained a worker base through the development of the metal section. The IAS appeared

much more reflective when it came to the ideological training of workers and, together with MAWU, created organisations that extended into the townships and were based on the democratic participation of union members.

Organisation in the region suffered a massive set back after MAWU was broken at Heinemann and was further disrupted by the 1976 uprising. The TUAAC and the IAS-MAWU, however, did not provide workers with any analysis of the urban revolt and leadership was left to students and homeland politicians. Igniting fears that the union movement would become political, significant state reforms were instigated. In addition a generation of workers that were politically aware and assertive was forged in the urban revolt. This would have important consequences for FOSATU in the 1980s.

In spite of the setbacks experienced in 1976, the unions were able to move forward. The first national unions were established, the use of the courts as a tactic was extended and unions attempted to mobilise the support of overseas unions to advance their campaigns for recognition. In-depth and democratic organisation at the plant level remained key. Unions were careful not to become reliant on 'pressure politics' and the intervention of international unions and increasingly ensured that shop stewards were included at all levels of the union struggle.

Notes: Chapter 6

[1] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 112.

[2] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 459.

[3] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of the Inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 12 December.

[4] HP: AH 1585: Report on the Progress Thus Far to the Meeting of the Industrial Aid Society Steering Committee, 2nd February, 1974.

[5] Steven Friedman, interview by NU, November 2004 and D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 267.

[6] Steven Friedman, interview by NU, November 2004.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] HP: AH 1585: Minutes, 16 February 1974.

[10] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 463.

[11] *ibid.*

[12] HP: AH 1585: Minutes, 21 September 1974.

[13] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 460.

[14] A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', p. 402-403.

[15] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 367,359 369.

[16] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 378.

[17] D. Lowry, *20 Years in*, p. 22 and Loet Douwes Dekker, interview by NU, November 2004.

[18] D. Lowry, *20 Years in'*, pp 96-97 and Loet Douwes Dekker, interview by NU, November 2004

[19] Steven Friedman, interview by NU, November 2004.

[20] HP: AH 1585: Minutes, 6 April 1974 and HP: AH 1585: Report of the Administrative Organiser to the Steering Committee for the Period 8/5/74-6/7/74 and HP: AH 1585: Minutes, 22 June 1974.

[21] HP: AH 1585: Report of the Administrative Organiser to the Steering Committee for the Period 8/5/74-6/7/74.

[22] HP: AH 1585: 'Policy on Forming Factory Committees' (n/d).

[23] HP: AH 1585: Minutes, 17 August 1974 (?) see also Report of the Meeting Held on 10 August 1974.

[24] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p.468.

[25] A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', p 385.

[26] Sitas claims that this meeting took place in February 1974 ('African Worker Responses', p. 385), but the minutes indicate that the general meeting was held in August (see Report of the Meeting Held on 10 August 1974).

[27] A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', p 385 – but no reference is given.

[28] HP: AH 1585: Suggestion for IAS Reconstruction, (n/d).

[29] HP: AH 1585: Suggestion for IAS Reconstruction, (n/d).

[30] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 464, 468–9 and A. Sitas, 'African Worker Responses', p 348.

[31] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the Industrial Aid Society, 22 March 1975.

[32] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of Executive Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 8 April 1975; Minutes of Executive Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 15 March 1975 and 8 April 1975.

[33] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of Executive Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 30 April 1975.

[34] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of the IAS Executive, held on 6 June 1975.

[35] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of Executive Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 30 June 1975 and HP: AH 1585: Minutes of Executive Committee of the Industrial Aid Society, 1 July 1975.

[36] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 466- 467.

[37] IIE handbooks (from Eddie Webster): IIE, The Workers Handbook No.3 *The Worker in the Factory*; IIE *The Workers' Organisation Book 1*; and Eddie Webster, interview with NU, November 2004.

[38] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of the Worker Education Meeting, 6 November 1976; Bernie Fanaroff, interview by NU, August 2003 and Chris Bonner, interview by NU, February 2003.

[39] Elizabeth Floyd, interview by Nicole Ulrich; Pat Horn, interview by Nicole Ulrich, Feburrary 2003; Taffy Adler, interview by NU, March 2003.

[40] J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival', p. 218; Sipho Kubhekha, interview by Noor Nieftagodien , June 2003.

[41] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 473.

[42] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 115.

[43] LACOM, 'Comrade Moss', Johannesburg, Learn and Teach Publications, 1989. pp. 56-57.

[44] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 475.

[45] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 476.

[46] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 116.

[47] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 278.

[48] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 478; D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p.279.

[49] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 478 and LACOM, 'Comrade Moss', pp. 57-58.

[50] LACOM, 'Comrade Moss', p. 57.

[51] Hemson et al, 'White Activists', 280.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, London, Zed Books, 1979, p. 243.

[54] D. Hemson *et al*, 'The Revival of', p.40 and B. Hirson, 'Year of Fire', p. 243.

[55] G. Gerhardt and T. Karis 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising,' T. Karis, and G. Gerhart. (eds.) *From Protest to Challenge: a documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882- 1990*. Volume 5, 1964 - 1979. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997. p. 172

[56] G. Gerhardt and T. Karis, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising', p. 172.

[57] G. Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict in Soweto, 1976- 1977,' MA Dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand, 1982. p. 63.

[58] G. Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict', p. 89.

[59] P. Bonner and N. Nieftagodien, *Kathorus*, p. 58.

[60] G. Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict', p. 83.

[61] P. Delius, *A Lion*, p. 88.

[62] Bernie Fanaroff, interview by NU, February 2003.

[63] B. Hirson, 'Year of Fire', p. 244.

[64] D. Lewis, 'Black Workers', p.216.

[65] G. Gerhardt and T. Karis, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising', pp. 171-2

[66] D. Lowry, *20 Years in*, p. 150.

[67] D. Hemson, *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 279.

[68] B. Hirson, 'Year of Fire', p. 244 and G. Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict', p. 42.

[69] B. Hirson, 'Year of Fire', p. 245 and G. Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict', p. 17.

[70] D. Hemson, *et al*, 'The Revival of' p. 40.

[71] B. Hirson, 'Year of Fire', p. 257.

[72] D. Hemson, *et al*, White Activists', 279- 280.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] T. Lodge, *All Here and Now: black politics in South Africa in the 1980s,* Africa Update Series, Ford-Foundation- Foreign Policy Association, 1991, p. 31.

[75] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 129.

[76] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[77] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions Since Wiehahn,' in *SALB*, 8 (4): February 1983, p.17.

[78] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation and the Draft Bill to Amend the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act (No. 48 of 1953). *SALB*, 2 (9&10): May/ June, pp. 31.

[79] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', pp.32-33.

[80] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', pp. 34-35.

[81] D. Horner, 'African Labour Representation', p. 32.

[82] J. Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 24.

[83] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 131

[84] These came out of the same mould as a code of conduct adopted by the British government in 1973. See 'Comment: The Code of Conduct and Trade Unions,' in *SALB*, 4 (7): November 1978, pp. 1-3.

[85] Comment, 'The Code', pp. 1-3.

[86] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', p.17; D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 281; Steven Friedman, interview by NU, November 2004.

[87] David Hemson, interview by NU, February 2003.

[88] Bafana Ndebele, interview by NU, November 2004.

[89] Bafana Ndebele, interview by NU, November 2004.

[90] P Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions ', p. 17.

[91] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', p. 202.

[92] HP: AH 1999: B 4.7. Secretariat report to TUACC Council Meeting, 17 October 1976

[93] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Minutes of the TUACC/ CIWW National Committee, 12 February 1977.

[94] HP: AH 1999: B5.1.3. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 9 February 1976.

[95] HP: AH 1999: B.5.1.3. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 11 October; B 4.7: Secretariat report to TUACC Council Meeting, 17 October 1976.

[96] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 180-185.

[97] *ibid.*

[98] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 184.

[99] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 256.

[100] J. Mawbey, 'Struggles in the Chemical Industry, ' in *SALB*, 4 (8): January- February 1979, p. 81.

[101] J. Mawbey, 'Struggles in the', p. 83.

[102] J. Mawbey, 'Struggles in the', p. 84.

[103] J. Mawbey, 'Struggles in the', p 86.

[104] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 256.

[105] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 257.

[106] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 484.

[107] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of IAS/MAWU Meeting, 25 June 1976.

[108] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.3. Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand, Background Document Submitted to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee Considering the Formation of a Federation of South African Trade Unions and Worker Organisations.

[109] *Ibid.*

[110] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.3. Background Document Submitted to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of South African Trade Unions and Worker Organisations, (CIWW) (n/d).

[111] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand: Projected Expenditure For 1978.

[112] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand: Projected Expenditure For 1978.

[113] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 482- 483.

[114] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 480.

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] Chris Bonner, interview by NU, February 2003.

[117] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 195-196

[118] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. MAWU Report to the TUACC Council on 26 February 1978

[119] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 221-222.

[120] HP: AH 1999: B4.10. Chemical Workers Industrial Union Report For Presentation a the Seconds Session of the TUACC Council Meeting, 18 June 1977.

[121] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. Chemical Workers Industrial Union Report For Presentation a the Seconds Session of the TUACC Council Meeting, 25 February 1978.

[122] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 258.

[123] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 259- 162.

[124] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. TUACC Secretariat Report to the TUACC Council held on 30 July 1978.

[125] HP: AH 1999: B11.1.1. Minutes of Meeting of TUACC (Tvl) , 5/3/1979; HP: AH 1999: B11.1.3. TUACC, Report of the Transvaal Region for the Period August- February 1979

[126] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', pp. 291-292.

[127] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 6.

[128] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 1.

[129] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand: Projected Expenditure For 1978.

[130] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', pp. 487.

[131] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', pp. 489.

[132] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 7-8.

[133] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 8.

[134] HP: AH 1585: Minutes of IAS Meeting, 6 August 1976.

[135] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 3

[136] HP: AH 1999: B12. T1UACC/CIWW Meeting, 12 February 1977.

[137] HP: AH 1999: B 12.1. Minutes of the TUACC/CIWW National Committee, 12 February 1977.

[138] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on 23 March 1977 to Discuss the Possible Formation of a New Union Federation and TUACC/CIWW Meeting, 12 February 1977.

[139] HP: AH 1999: B12.1TUACC/CIWW Meeting, 12 February 1977.

[140] HP: AH 1999: B12.1TUACC/CIWW Meeting, 12 February 1977.

[141] HP: AH1999: B3. Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the National Executive Council of the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council, 30 July 1978.

[142] HP: 1999: B11.1.2. Minutes of the CIWW held 23 June 1978

[143] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 492-493.

[144] HP: 1999: B11.1.2. Minutes of a Meeting of the TUACC (Tvl) Secretariat, 18 September 1978.

[145] HP: 1999: B11.1.2. Minutes of a Meeting of the TUACC (Tvl) Secretariat 16/10/78 and Minutes of TUACC Regional Council, 10 November 1978.

[146] Chris Bonner, interview by NU, February 2003.

[147] LACOM. 'Comrade Moss, p. 63.

[148] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[149] HP: AH 1999: B4.6. Minutes of the 5th Council Meeting, 29 February 1976- see minutes for meeting continues on 28 March included (pp. 3-8).

[150] HP: AH 1999: B4.6. Minutes of the 5th Council Meeting, 29 February 1976 (Minutes for meeting continued on 28 March included p. 4).

[151] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 229-30.

[152] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 191-192.

[153] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 122 and J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 192.

[154] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 192.

[155] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 285-286 and J. Ravindra, 'Forbo Krommenie Strike Case,' in *SALB*, 4 (8): January- February 1979, p. 87-89.

[156] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of ', pp. 288- 289.

[157] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. Minutes of the TUACC Council Meeting, 26 February 1978; Report to the March 1978 TUACC Council Meeting of the Secretariat From the Period June 1977 to March 1978.

[158] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. Report to the March 1978 TUACC Council Meeting of the Secretariat From the Period June 1977 to March 1978.

[159] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 3.

[160] HP: AH 1585: CIWW: Report for the Period January 1977- June 1977. p. 4.

Chapter 7:
Political Alliances, the State and the Formation of FOSATU, 1977-1979.

7.1. Introduction

From 1977 TUACC started to consolidate at the local and national level and even started to develop relations with trade unions overseas. At the same time, opportunities opened up for TUACC to play a more prominent role in shaping the local trade union movement. TUACC participated in the unity talks that led to the formation of a national federation of unregistered trade unions and, together with NUMARWOSA, submitted evidence to the Wiehahn Commission. The unity talks heightened tensions in the emerging union movement, but TUACC managed to play a leading role in determining the structures and policies of the new federation as well as the way in which the new federation would respond to the anticipated labour reform. TUACC was also compelled to take a decision on Inkatha, but its policy on how to relate to cross-class nationalist movements remained contradictory.

7.2. Political Alliances and the Independence of the New Workers Movement

Unionists in TUACC were struggling to come to grips with Inkatha. As Inkatha stepped up efforts to woo workers, the differences between TUACC, which was now attempting to organise public sector workers in the KwaZulu homeland, and Inkatha were brought into sharp focus.[1] In March 1976, for instance, workers at the Umlazi Roads Department called on Chief Xolo, Minister of Roads and Works, to discuss problems with their liaison committee. Xolo 'strongly condemned the idea of workers having any dealings with the union whatsoever' and encouraged them to join Inkatha instead.[2] In the same year the Director of Works sent out an official circular, which noted that 'trade unions are interfering more and more with workers of this Department' and while there could be no objection to workers joining unions, such unions were not recognised by the KwaZulu government and had no official standing.[3]

There were other points of contention. Inkatha, which claimed to oppose discriminatory wages and support the extension of trade union rights to African workers, sought to

become more active in the field of labour relations. Inkatha assured management '…that it was a responsible organisation and wished to establish a genuine partnership of employers and employees.'[4] The prevention of disinvestments, which Inkatha claimed would hurt black workers, was one area in which cooperation was possible. Inkatha maintained that the best way forward would be to ensure that the codes of employment practices developed by employers were implemented and proposed that, together with other unions, Inkatha should monitor compliance with these codes. These aims conflicted with those of TUACC, which not only chose to remain neutral on the question of disinvestments, but also had little faith in the codes of conduct that did not recognise non-racial or African unions.[5]

Eventually TUACC officials agreed that while the unions could enter into 'diplomatic relationships' based on expediency, such relations should 'never ever exercise the slightest degree of influence on the union movement either in respect of its policies or in respect to its activities.'[6] By 1978 it was decided that TUACC would not affiliate to Inkatha, although it would not object to individual workers joining.[7] In the absence of a clearly defined political programme, however, this policy reduced the political role of trade unions in the minds of members, who increasingly viewed the unions as a means through which to fight for workers demands at the workplace and nationalist organisations as vehicles for political change.

Pat Horn, for example, notes that workers could be:[8]

> members of political parties and the unions at the same time… So in the unions they were fighting for better working conditions, they were also fighting against apartheid. They were fighting against anything that was bad for workers. They [members] also had their political lives where … some people [supported] Matanzima, some people supported the IFP, many people supported the ANC in exile. Many people had relatives who were in the armed struggle. All of that was understood to be the case. That was freedom of association, a freedom of choice.

> There wasn't a contradiction because everybody, no matter what their political beliefs, has problems at work and that was what the union was for.

Maree documents the experiences of a MAWU organiser who was elected onto the executive of Inkatha in his local area.[9] The organiser was shocked by the lack of democracy within the organisation and came to believe that Inkatha mainly promoted the interest of other classes- 'big people' and storekeepers- and subsequently resigned. Nonetheless, hundreds of workers did maintain a dual membership, leading to a contradictory coexistence of workers' democracy, socialism and the call for worker unity with the acceptance of an ethnically based cross-class populist movement that discouraged criticism of political leaders.

Unionists in Natal failed to interrogate these contradictions. Pat Horn recalls:[10]

> everybody just understood that we are in IFP territory, we all support the IFP, we never say anything against the IFP. The IFP kind of supported FOSATU, although it used to be a double-edged support…We had a big function for the launch of FOSATU in Northern Natal, the [KwaZulu] Minister of the Interior and Labour …slated unions and what he called undue strikes. Everybody just totally ignored it because they were waiting for the meat to come on. It was a very insulting speech, if the papers had been there it would have been put as a contradiction- guest speaker criticises the organisation that he is launching. Everybody totally ignored it and when he was finished they clapped and went to have their meat.

Even though TUACC in Natal was keen to maintain the autonomy of the new workers movement, unionists left the political affiliations of workers unchallenged and its policy on alliances was largely a defensive move designed to protect the unions from being swallowed up by a powerful populist movement. Nevertheless, unionists in the Transvaal, who were critical of union alliances with nationalist parties and sought to build a politically independent workers' movement that could fight for socialism and national liberation on its own terms, were already developing a more coherent political position.

This position, which called on workers to take control of their political destiny through democratic working class organisations, would later be adopted and developed by FOSATU.

7.3. NUMARWOSA and the Search for Unity

The TUACC was not able to unite unregistered trade unions and the move to create a national federation in the first half of 1977 came from an unlikely source- the registered NUMARWOSA and the UAW that were based in the Eastern Cape. NUMARWOSA, which was formed in the late 1960s, was a registered union for coloured workers that organised in the motor and rubber industries, mostly in the Eastern Cape, and an affiliate of TUCSA. Adler, who has written the history of the union, details how a group of 'insurgents', including Fred Sauls and Joe Foster, challenged the bureaucratic nature of the union that had become typical of TUCSA unions.[11] Once these 'insurgents' managed to take over the leadership of the union, structures were democratised. The union now relied on the leadership of elected and accountable shop stewards and ensured that decision-making shifted from officials to workers on the factory floor. NUMARWOSA also started to focus on African workers. Given the growing importance of African workers in the industry the new NUMARWOSA leaders realised that any motor union that failed to organise African workers would be severely limited. Adler argues, however, that the original impulse for organising African workers '…came less from such strategic concerns and more form a general political understanding of the workers' situation."[12]

According to Adler, those who led the challenge against the old guard were part of an informal discussion/reading group that drew on material from a range of organisations including the Unity Movement and the exile movements. This group, however, developed a general political outlook similar to that of the Black Consciousness Movement. Due to the legal restrictions placed on the organisation of African workers, NUMARWOSA decided to set up a parallel union (the UAW), which it planned to merge with in future.[13] Although relations between NUMARWOSA-UAW and UTP organisers were strained in Port Elizabeth, cordial relations were established with UTP structures in Durban and Pretoria.[14]

NUMARWOSA, which found little enthusiasm for organising African workers within TUCSA and disapproved of the bureaucratic character of TUCSA, withdrew from the federation in December 1976. Leaders in NUMARWOSA-UAW started to look to other like-minded trade unions for new allies and called for the formation of a national federation.[15] Contact was made with the TUACC, CIWW, UTP-CCOBTU and a number of Cape based unions including the WPWAB, the Breweries and Goldsmiths Union, and the Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union (which had undergone a similar grass-roots led rejuvenation of leadership and had let its affiliation to TUCSA lapse).[16] All these structures professed themselves keen and a joint meeting to discuss cooperation was set for the 23 March 1977.[17]

By this time NUMARWOSA-UAW and TUACC were already moving closer together. NUMARWOSA-UAW had some dealings with MAWU in the South African committee of the IMF and proved to have much in common with the TUACC.[18] According to Adler, the NUMARWOSA-UAW was moving away from its initial Black Consciousness position and also aimed to unite workers, regardless of their race, on a national level.[19] NUMARWOSA and the TUACC began to share resources and ideas and Adler argues that NUMARWOSA and the UAW, which did not have the same support from university based intellectuals, received educational material with an explicitly class based analysis from the IIE and worker intellectuals within NUMARWOSA and the UAW started to develop a class based understanding of society.[20]

The joint meeting brought unions from Natal, the Transvaal and the Cape together and included representatives from 11 UTP-CCOBTU unions, the TUACC, CIWW, NUMARWOSA-UAW, and the WPWAB.[21] Uniting unregistered trade unions would prove difficult to achieve, especially in the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, and unions started to clash almost immediately as they tried to stamp their form of unionism onto the new federation. Lowry maintains that representatives from the UTP-CCOBTU unions perceived proposals for cooperation as 'a white-led takeover bid'.[22] The UTP-CCOBTU unions distributed a memo that stressed their policy of advancing black leadership and

listed their objections to other unions, especially MAWU that was organising on the Witwatersrand, claiming that TUACC's expansion into the Transvaal would just confuse and fragment workers.[23] The memo noted that the CCOBTU unions would only consider cooperation if the other unions amended their way of operation to suit the needs of the CCOBTU.[24]

TUACC and the CIWW also came prepared and sent a large delegation to the meeting.[25] It should be noted that TUACC and the CIWW were still in the process of establishing the terms of their relationship at this time and at first disagreed on the terms upon which union cooperation should be based. While the TUACC favoured the formation of a 'tight' alliance, the CIWW was concerned about tensions in the Transvaal and preserving regional autonomy and wondered if a loose federation would not be more suitable.[26] It was agreed, however, that the TUACC and the CIWW would call for 'close cooperation' - based on developing common policies, sharing resources, and promoting workers' democracy- at the meeting.[27]

Bonner argues that three main areas of contention were raised at this initial meeting that would remain prominent in the course of discussions.[28] These included the argument that the unregistered trade unions were still too weak to consider cooperation and the federation would become a cumbersome bureaucratic structure imposed on the unions. The second concern related to the UTP-CCOBTU's policy on black leadership and they feared that the white and coloured representatives of other unions would confuse and divide black workers. Finally, concerns were raised that the federation would be established before unions were given an opportunity to iron out their differences.

The CCOBTU was based on a loose form of cooperation and, without a shared position on a new federation, representatives soon pulled in different directions. While unions still affiliated to TUCSA – including the NUCW and the Transvaal Textile Workers Union- decided to pull out of the negotiations, others broke from their rigid position outlined in the memorandum and endorsed a resolution to establish an *ad hoc* Feasibility Committee that would investigate the possibility of forming a new federation.[29]

The Feasibility Committee –consisting of one representative from the CIWW, two from the TUACC, one from NUMARWOSA/ UAW, two from the UTP, and one from the WPWAB - met for the first time in April. While Lowry notes that CCOBTU had more members, TUACC was better organised and soon held the upper hand. The TUACC and the CIWW were already working together, which meant that they had more weight on the Feasibility Committee, and quickly obtained dominance by presenting arguments that were based on well-developed proposals that had been circulated amongst affiliates. The basis of cooperation proved a central issue and the TUACC and the CIWW once again called for the formation of a national federation that would: decide on common policies, pool resources, standardise worker agreements with employers; collect and research information on workers rights; obtain legal opinions and exploit what rights workers did have; and train seasoned organisers to negotiate with management. [30] They also stressed that the federation should be based on workers' control- which would allow elected worker representative to make the decisions and keep officials accountable to the rank and file. [31]

The Feasibility Committee, which agreed that the new federation should be called Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), decided that further cooperation would be based on a formal and close relationship. [32] It was also decided that national trade unions would not expand any further to prevent competition. To alleviate the fears that a bureaucratic monster would be created and that unions would not be given an opportunity to discuss their differences, the meeting passed a resolution that union branches should take part in Regional Federation Meetings. Such meetings would discuss demarcation issues, establish lines of communication, and allow for members to become actively involved in the establishment of the new federation. [33] It was resolved that such meetings should be, 'arranged as to accord every opportunity for membership participation. [34].

Although the WPWAB had a representative on the Feasibility Committee, any further participation of the unregistered trade unions in Cape Town remained unclear. Brian

Fredericks from NUMARWOSA was mandated to hold a meeting with the Cape unions and in June he reported that he had met with a range of unions, including the FCWU and the WPWAB.[35] Unionists claimed that their unions were still too weak and that the federation was premature. They were not ready to participate in the unity talks. Friedman maintains that these unions privately feared that the TUACC would dominate the new alliance.[36] Nonetheless, it was agreed that the Feasibility Committee would keep in contact with the Cape unions and continued to invite them to meetings.

The first round of Regional Federation Meetings yielded mixed results. In Natal trade unions made the most progress in terms of overcoming their differences. Their meeting held on the 4 June 1977 included TUACC and NUMARWOSA as well as UTP-CCOBTU linked unions such as the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) and Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAWU). There was little conflict and it was agreed the new federation should centralise the administration of affiliates; combine and strengthen education facilities; negotiate and obtain recognition from employers; and coordinate activities for the benefit of all members.[37] While concerns were raised about the limited number of worker representatives in attendance, those present committed themselves to encouraging more worker participation.[38] In the other regions, however, tensions quickly came to the fore. The UTP-CCOBTU linked EAWU and SFAWU refused to attend a regional meeting in Port Elizabeth and decided to vacate the offices provided by NUMARWOSA without notice.[39] In the Transvaal disagreements over who would serve as representatives at the meeting prevented any meetings from taking place.[40]

Relations at the level of the Feasibility Committee were also strained and, according to Bonner, further controversy arouse over the draft budget and proposed appointment of a permanent official.[41] The TUACC and the CIWW objected to these measures on the grounds that a bureaucratic superstructure would be created even before the federation had been properly formulated and it was agreed that such issues could only be decided once regional cooperation had been established. The Feasibility Committee focused on the Transvaal region and the chair was mandated to bring the unions together. A meeting

was eventually set for the 21 June, but was not very productive as representatives spent most their time arguing. [42] Once again, representation featured as a central concern. Maree claims that the CIWW wanted the entire executives of unions to attend, while the UTP-CCOBTU unions insisted that only union secretaries sould be represented [43] In addition, the CIWW criticised the UTP unions for not encouraging workers to participate, while the UTP unions objected to the attendance of non-union bodies such as the IAS. [44] The meeting deadlocked over MAWU's growth in the Transvaal and regional talks stalled for over a year.[45] It would later become evident, however, that much more fundamental issues were at stake for the CCOBTU, which was coming apart and many of the UTP unions were experiencing serious internal conflicts.

In spite of the difficulties with the Cape unions and the UTP-CCOBTU in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape, discussion continued and the TUACC, CIWW and NUMARWOSA-UAW were drawn closer together. At the end of 1977 NUMARWOSA-UAW asked the TUACC to assist with the organisation of textile workers in Port Elizabeth and the CIWW subsequently agreed to aid the UAW with unionising workers at the Sigma plant near Pretoria. [46] Most significantly, these union groupings decided to unite around the Wiehahn Commission and respond jointly.

7.4. Responding to the Wiehahn Commission

Friedman claims that in the period leading up to the final report, government officials and Professor Wiehahn himself indicated that the Commission would propose far reaching reforms.[47] He argues that, it soon became clear that the Commission was not an inquiry at all, but a vehicle for testing the reform's acceptability to key labour interest groups. These interest groups- including employers associations and registered trade unions- were represented on the Commission and thereby given a stake in the plan. Even though unregistered trade unions, which were not represented, were deeply suspicious of the outcomes, TUACC, CIWW, NUMARWOSA, UAW decided to submit evidence. [48]

The decision to engage with the Commission was informed by the historical experiences of these unions, which, Philip Bonner argues, shaped their understanding of the state.

NUMARWOSA and the UAW had already worked within industrial structures without undermining union autonomy or democratic shop-floor organisation.[49] NUMARWOSA and the UAW rejected a functionalist approach to the state and had learned that strong unions could use the structures established by government and employers to their own advantage. Bonner maintains that unionists in TUACC believed that strong plant based organisation together with entering into legally binding agreements with employers (such as recognition agreements) '…would serve as defensive ramparts for workers in a hostile situation, and as platforms for further advances once conditions improved'.[50] The TUACC unions understood the importance of gaining basic rights and they based their engagement with structures sanctioned by government or employers on their ability to use such structures to further union goals. In sharp contract to SACTU, TUACC position rested on the assumption that while the state was a repressive instrument, it was '…located in a nexus of contradictory social relations and whose characteristic is determined by the changing relations between the classes involved.'[51] This meant that unions should pressure the state to make concessions and unions should make use of any advances to further their own aims.

Consequently, unionists within TUACC, CIWW, NUMARWOSA, UAW believed that unregistered trade unions had little to lose by submitting evidence and in the worst case the Commission would ignore their contributions and maintain the *status quo.* The unregistered trade unions had little reason to trust the apartheid government, and the TUACC, CIWW, NUMARWOSA and UAW first noted their reservations of the Commission in a joint press statement.[52] They stated that it was unlikely that the Wiehahn Commission would take the concerns of unregistered trade unions seriously and indicated that the black representatives on the Commission, who did not have any 'practical experience' of the unregistered trade unions, were unable to represent black workers effectively.

This was followed by the submission of written evidence in November.[53] The document outlined the shortcomings of a variety of laws (including the Factories Act, Workman Compensation Act and the Unemployment Insurance Fund) as well as the Department of

Labour.[54] The submission rested on a key political demand and called for the freedom of association to be extended to all workers. Related to this, the submission argued that unions that were sufficiently representative should be guaranteed collective bargaining rights and recognition by management as well as the right to operate without fear of victimisation from either managers or the state.

It would take another two years before the Wiehahn Commission would make its recommendations public and the TUACC's Secretariat noted that '…it is not optimistic about the outcome of the Wiehahn Commission and reports received from a number of sources confirm this. We should continue to organise actively rather than wait for anything form this Commission.'[55] This, however, was the first time that the trade unions that would form the core of FOSATU acted in unison and they were able to establish common ground on how to relate to future reforms.

7.5. Competing Traditions and Unity Talks in the Transvaal

During the second half of 1978 unity talks were revived in the Transvaal. This was largely precipitated by the CCOBTU's proposal to form an alternative federation to FOSATU. With two possible federations on the table the differences between the emerging unions were highlighted and the conflicts between the UTP-CCOBTU and the TUACC in the Transvaal heightened. This time contestation revolved around two main issues – democracy and trade union militancy.

The UTP linked unions in the CCOBTU had adopted a more moderate approach to union organisation. Maree points out, however, that there were some regional variations in the UTP unions and that union branches on the East Rand were more confrontational and workers manifested a more militant consciousness.[56] As Bonner notes, the UTP unions were not based on workers' control and did not develop democratic shop floor structures.[57] For example, Mr Mqhayi, who was approached by members of his church to become involved in the EAWU and was appointed, rather than elected, as a shop steward, confirms this.[58] No mechanisms were put in place for the rank and file to hold their

executives accountable and the power to make decisions lay with the general secretaries, who were the primary participants in the loosely structured CCOBTU.[59]

Maree argues that with the formation of FOSATU, the CCOBTU unionists were exposed to an alternative tradition. Since the CCOBTU's participation in the unity talks was based on unaccountable officials, it would appear that contact with the TUACC and the CIWW was limited in this forum. Activists in the CIWW, however, played an active part in making contact with UTP organisers and discussing ideas. Taffy Adler from the CIWW recalls:[60]

> When we started the discussion on FOSATU there was a decision to interact with the UTP unions on the assumption that if we could not win them, then at least split them and bring some of them in. And certainly that happened… It's not that easy, basically you present alternatives and people make a choice. And if they had decided on the basis of whatever the benefits that they thought they might gain by joining FOSATU, then they must do that.

During the latter part of the 1970s the CCOBTU block was weakened by internal conflicts, mostly fuelled by power struggles between executive members, in at least four UTP unions. Lowry maintains that these internal conflicts reflected a crisis of growth and consolidation.[61] Similarly, Friedman explains that as the UTP unions began to expand, their elected executive committees began to demand a greater say and accused their general secretaries of taking decisions without consulting them.[62]

It was against this background that Henry Chipeya, secretary of the UTP, mooted the idea of creating an alternative federation.[63] Since union secretaries in CCOBTU appeared disinterested, Chipeya called a meeting of national and branch presidents, where it was recommended that the UTP-CCOBTU unions should first investigate the progress made in the unity talks to set up FOSATU. At the end of August a meeting that included TUACC (Tvl) and the UTP-CCOBTU was held. Workers were mobilised to attend and representatives from the Glass and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), which had a strong

East Rand following; the East Rand branch of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers of South Africa (CCAWUSA); and workers from PWAWU, SFAWU, and the Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU) attended.[64] Petrus Tom, and organiser for the UTP who disapproved of the undemocratic practices within the EAWU and Jane Hlogwane's refusal to take the concerns of the EAWU's executive into account, also actively encouraged EAWU members from the Vaal Triangle to attend the meeting (Tom subsequently became a leading FOSATU unionist and community leader in the Vaal during the 1980s).[65] This was one of the first times that workers from the UTP were given a chance to participate in the unity talks and the TUACC (Tvl) and NUMARWOSA-UAW were shocked to learn that workers had not been informed about the new federation or its progress. [66] Much of the meeting was taken up with the UTP participants lambasting their officials.

In October 1978 a follow up meeting was held. Although the same old conflicts surfaced, three UTP unions- EAWU, GAWU and PWAWU - decided to take part in FOSATU. Believing that these unions were 'a bad influence' the CCOBTU expelled the GAWU and the EAWU, evicted these unions from their offices, and refused to return their records.[67] In the case of the EAWU, Jane Hlogwane, who was expelled from the union by the executive, claimed that the EAWU had been split and seized the assets and the funds of the union.[68] The Feasibility Committee assisted the UTP unions that decided to join the federation financially and applied for a court interdict against Jane Hlogwane.[69] The UTP retaliated by writing to the ICFTU and other international trade unions, claiming that the new federation was using overseas donations to split the CCOBTU and its affiliates.[70]

These difficulties did not prevent the Feasibility Committee from forging ahead. After proposals were made to restructure the Feasibility Committee to ensure that all the participating unions were sufficiently represented and a seminar was arranged for all the participating bodies, the first interim structures of the federation were established in November 1978. [71] These consisted of an Interim Central Committee of FOSATU as well as Interim Regional Executive Committees.[72] With the inclusion of the EAWU, GAWU,

and PWAWU, the Transvaal region of the federation also started to stabilise and a number of 'factory plans'- a scheme whereby those trade unions that organised in the same factory agreed to work together- were drawn up.[73] In the Port Elizabeth and Natal discussions over some of the industrial sectors had already moved away from demarcation issues and the amalgamation of the metal unions was seriously contemplated.[74] At the same time, other trade unions from the Cape- including the Brewery Employers Union, the Liquor and Catering Trades, the Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union- also expressed an interest in joining FOSATU.[75]

7.6. The Formation of FOSATU

The new federation was inaugurated between the 13-15 April 1979 in Hammanskraal. As Bonner notes, this was a significant development and FOSATU became the first federation of predominantly unregistered trade unions to operate openly in South Africa since SACTU went into exile and the FOFATUSA dissolved.[76] Even though the federation brought unions from a variety of different traditions together, the type of workers' control developed by TUACC left a distinct mark on the new structure.

While some authors claim that FOSATU started with a combined membership of 45,000 others are more cautions and suggest that 35,000 (with many not fully paid up) is a more accurate reflection.[77] According to Gerald Kraak, early affiliates consisted of a number of unregistered unions – including the TUACC's NUTW; MAWU; TGWU and CWIU; the UTP's PWAWU; SFAWU; and GAWU (Glass); and the UAW. In addition to NUMARWOSA, a number of registered unions were also drawn in – including Western Province Motor Assemblies Worker Union (WPMAWU); the Chemical and General Workers Union (CGWU) and the Eastern Province Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union (EPSF&AWU).[78] The NUMARWOSA, WPMAWU, UAW, were subsequently merged in the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), while the EPSF&AWU was incorporated into the SFAWU and the CGWU joined the CWIU.

Polices adopted by FOSATU reflect those developed by TUACC. FOSATU was committed to building non-racial industrial trade unions that were national in character

and based on strong factory floor organisation at the local level.[79] Workers' control was a guiding principal and in *FOSATU Worker News* it was noted that active members and shop stewards were an essential component of a worker-controlled movement, which would ensure that worker leaders truly represented and advanced the interests of workers in society.[80] The federation, therefore, encouraged an active and well informed membership that supported each other and their elected shop stewards in the struggle to improve the rights of workers in the workplace.

Provisions were made to ensure that workers dominated and occupied key positions in the Central Committee and Executive Committee. FOSATU was a tight federation, which meant that cooperation between affiliates would be encouraged at all levels of organisation; resources of unions would be pooled and shared at the regional and local levels; and that there would be a high degree of consensus and policies would be binding on affiliates.[81] Attempts were made to balance central and regional power and Regional Councils and Committees, which had jurisdiction over a wide range of regional issues, and Locals were provided for.[82]

The formation of a new federation was not the only shift to take place in the emerging union movement. The Cape based unions developed new tactics and drew on the community to boycott products in order to strengthen the demands of workers. The FCWU's strike at Fattis and Monis in June 1980 intersected with school boycotts, a bus boycott and the community was mobilised to support workers, while the WPGWU initiated a meat strike and boycott in May 1980.[83] At the same time a new tendency emerged in the progressive union movement, predominantly in the Eastern Cape, with the formation of South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) that broke from BAWU in 1979. SAAWU has been described as a 'community union' and was not only much more overtly political than any of the other emerging unions, but also aimed to take up issues beyond the workplace (such as rents and transport) that impacted on workers.[84] Rather than workers' control, this union promoted 'mass participatory democracy', which meant that key decisions were made at mass meetings as opposed to factory departments or the workplace.[85] This focus on the community and on political issues spread to other part of

the country, leading to a split in the UAW's Cortina branch where the union failed to support a strike led by the rank and file to oppose the dismissal of Thozamile Botha, a local community leader in PEBCO.

One of the most important issues confronting the workers movement was the publication of the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations in May 1979 and the drafting of the government's white paper and new Industrial Conciliation Bill.[86] The Wiehahn Commission rejected the dual industrial relations system already in existence, arguing that union rights should be extended to African workers.[87] The aims of these recommendations were made very clear - unregistered trade unions would be brought under state control and prevented from becoming political.[88] Bonner argues that the government, which was under pressure from the homeland governments and hard-line apartheid constituencies, did not accept all of the Commission's recommendations and decided to exclude migrants from this dispensation and maintain proscriptions of non-racial unions.[89]

The emerging unions were united in their objections to the exclusion of migrants, forcing the Minister of Manpower to extend rights to migrants and frontier commuters in September 1979, but were deeply divided on other issues surrounding registration.[90] FOSATU rejected the notion that unions would become bureaucratic and incorporated under state control if they registered and affiliates decided to register on condition that the unacceptable features of the new Industrial Consolidation Act were removed. FOSATU affiliates, therefore, would only register if non-racial unions were accepted; provisional registration was scrapped; restrictions on the democratic factory floor organisation were removed; and registration was granted on a broad industrial basis.[91] FOSATU's stand on registration would bear fruit and in July 1980 the state granted non-racial exemptions to six FOSATU affiliates.[92]

Much like the 1970s, the early 1980s was characterised by an upsurge in militant worker action. This time strike action was concentrated on the East Rand and workers did not only demand higher wages, but opposed the government's new Pensions Bill.[93] Unlike

the 1970s, these workers were organised and employers and the state had conceded that non-racial unions had a right to exist.[94] FOSATU operated in a very different context to TUACC and workers' control would adapt to new challenges that confronted the union movement, giving rise to the most notable expressions of the workers' control tradition in the form of large militant shop stewards councils.[95]

7.7. Conclusion

Between 1977 and 1978 the TUACC eventually took a position on Inkatha and decided to steer clear of entering into alliances that may compromise the autonomy of the workers movement. Nevertheless, it was only with the formation of FOSATU that a more coherent political position was developed. In addition, talks were held to unite the emerging unions and like-minded registered trade unions into a national federation. These talks highlighted the different union approaches that had been developed in different regions throughout the 1970s. While the Cape unions bowed out of the talks early on, the UTP-CCOBTU unions and the TUACC-CIWW confronted each other head on. This fuelled much conflict in the Transvaal region and discussions were delayed for some time. Even so, TUACC-CIWW and the auto unions, NUMARWOSA and the UAW, developed a close relationship and were able to mould the core character of the future federation. In so doing these bodies drafted a joint submission to the Wiehahn Commission. This joint action laid the groundwork for FOSATU's approach to the subsequent labour reforms and informed the federation's position on registration.

At the end of 1978 the UTP-CCOBTU unions returned to the negotiation table, although there were already suggestions that these union would form an alternative federation. The democratic practice of the TUACC attracted unionists and workers that were frustrated by the unaccountable action of their union secretaries. Consequently, FOSATU was able to capture a number of UTP-CCOBTU unions. FOSATU, which was inaugurated in April 1979, marked the victory of the workers' control tradition that was initiated by the open unions in Natal.

Notes: Chapter 7

[1] HP: AH 1999: B6.3. Minutes of Meeting of Union Officials, 26 April 1976; B 5.1.3. Minutes of Secretariat meeting, 10 May 1976; B5.1.3. Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat, 31 June 1976; J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 350.

[2] HP: AH 1999: B14.4. Umlazi-ZC Civil Servants, 14.4.76.

[3] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. Ref No: S 2/2/2 Circular:1976 'Trade Unions',1976.

[4] HP: AH 1999: B12.4. 'Mr Thula'

[5] Comment, 'The Code', pp. 1-3

[6] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 352.

[7] HP: AH 1999: B 5.1.5. TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 13 February 1978.

[8] Pat Horn, interviewed by NU, February 2003.

[9] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 352-353.

[10] Pat Horn, interview by NU, February 2003.

[11] G.M. Adler, "The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in it": race, class and collective action in the South African Motor Industry, 1967-1986,' PhD Thesis: Columbia University, 1994, pp. 218-222.

[12] G.M. Adler, 'The Factory Belongs', p. 221.

[13] G.M. Adler, 'The Factory Belongs', p. 224.

[14] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU,' in *SALB*, 5 (1): May 1979, p. 10.

[15] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 181 and G.M. Adler, 'The Factory Belongs', p. 224.

[16] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 11.

[17] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1 Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on 23 March 1977 to Discuss the Possible Formation of a New Union Federation.

[18] See P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 10.

[19] G.M. Adler, 'The Factory Belongs', pp. 225-226.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 11.

[22] D. Lowry, *20 Years of*, pp. 192, 167 and J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 496-7.

[23] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1. Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on 23 March 1977 to Discuss the Possible Formation of a New Union Federation and P. Bonner 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 12.

[24] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 12.

[25] HP: AH1999: B6.3 Minutes of the TUACC Secretariat, 7 March 1977.

[26] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Minutes of the Joint TUACC-CIWW meeting, 21 May 1977

[27] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1. Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on 23 March 1977 to discuss the Possible Formation of a New Federation. See also HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1.3. 'The Tuacc welcomes this initiative for cooperation…' Report (no title) n/d. and HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. Background Document Submitted to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of South African Trade Unions and Worker Organisations (CIWW) (n/d).

[28] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 13.

[29] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 181; HP: AH 1999 C1.1.1Report on Meeting in Johannesburg on23 March 1977 to Discuss the Possible Formation of a New Union Federation.

[30] HP: AH1999 C1.1.3. Background Document Presented by the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of Trade Unions, April 1977.

[31] HP: AH1999 C1.1.3. Background Document Presented by the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council to the Ad Hoc Feasibility Committee of Proposed Federation of Trade Unions, April 1977.

[32] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1.Minutes of the Feasibility Committee, (n/d).

[33] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1.Minutes of the Feasibility Committee, (n/d).

[34] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1.Minutes of the Feasibility Committee, (n/d).

[35] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1.Minutes of Natal Regional Federation Meeting. 4 June 1977 and Minutes of the Feasibility Committee Meeting, 13 June 1977

[36] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 182 and D. Lowry, *20 Years of*, p. 192.

[37] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1.Minutes of Natal Regional Federation Meeting. 4 June 1977.

[38] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1: Minutes of Natal Regional Federation Meeting. 4 June and Minutes of the Feasibility Committee Meeting, 13 June 1977.

[39] HP: AH1999: C.1.1.1:.Minutes of the Feasibility Committee Meeting, 13 June 1977.

[40] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 15.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1. Report on a Meeting Held Between the Black Consultative Unions and the CIWW, 21 June 1977.

[43] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 497.

[44] HP: AH 1999: C1.1.1Report on a Meeting Held Between the Black Consultative Unions and the CIWW, 21 June 1977 and P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 15.

[45] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 498.

[46] HP: AH 1999: B12.1. Minutes of a CIWW-TUACC Meeting, 12 November 1977.

[47] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 149-50.

[48] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. Report to the March 1978 TUACC Council Meeting of the TUACC Secretariat for the Period June 1977 to March 1978.

[49] P. Bonner, 'Independent Unions', pp 23-24.

[50] P. Bonner, 'Independent Unions Since', p. 23.

[51] F. Fine *et al*, 'Trade Unions', p. 193.

[52] HP: AH 1999: B.13.2: Press Statement, (n/d).

[53] HP: AH 1999: B6.3. Minuets of the TUACC Secretariat, 22 August 1977. It should be noted that since the Consultative Committee unions were no longer part of the Feasibility Committee, the UTP and some Consultative unions submitted their own evidence separately.

[54] HP: AH 1999: B13.2. Memorandum Submitted to the Commission of Enquiry into Labour Appointed in Terms of General Notice 445 of 1977 in Government Gazette 5651 of 8th July 1977.

[55] HP: AH 1999: B4.11. Report to the March 1978 TUACC Council Meeting of the TUACC Secretariat for the Period June 1977 to March 1978.

[56] J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 391.

[57] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', pp. 5-6.

[58] Mr Mqhayi, interview by Tshepo Moloi (TM) and NU, November 2004.

[59] HP: AH1999; C1.1.1. Report on a meeting held on the 30/8/78 at Diakoni House Braamfontein to Discuss the Federation

[60] Taffy Adler, interview by NU, March 2003.

[61] D. Lowry, *20 years in*, p. 168 and see also J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', pp. 444-445.

[62] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 183.

[63] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 18.

[64] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1Report on a meeting held on the 30/8/78 at Diakoni House Braamfontein to Discuss the Federation; J. Maree, 'An Analysis of', p. 499; P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 19.

[65] M. Legassick, 'The Revival', pp. 31- 33 and Boy Petrus Tom, interviewed by Simon Zwane, October 2004, SADET Oral History Project.

[66] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1Report on a meeting held on the 30/8/78 at Diakoni House Braamfontein to Discuss the Federation.

[67] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1Minutes of the Feasibility Committee Meeting, 18 September 1978. p. 2; C1.1.3: FOSATU Interim Secretary's Report, October 1978- March 1979; and HP: AH1999: C1.1.2. Letter from the South African Chemical Workers Union, CCAWUSA, Textile Workers Union, National Union of Clothing Workers of South Africa to O. Kersten, General Secretary of the ICFTU, 27 November 1978.

[68] HP: AH1999: C1.1.2. Letter from FOSATU to O. Kersten, General Secretary of the ICFTU, 15 February 1979.

[69] HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. FOSATU Interim Secretary's Report, October 1978- March 1979.

[70] HP: AH1999: C1.1.3. FOSATU Interim Secretary's Report, October 1978- March 1979.

[71] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1. Minutes of the Feasibility Committee Meeting, 18 September 1978 and Minutes of the Interim Transvaal Committee of FOSATU, 13 December and P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 20.

[72] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1. Minutes of the Interim Transvaal Committee of FOSATU, 13 December.

[73] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1. Minutes of the Interim Transvaal Committee of FOSATU, 13 December.

[74] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1. Minutes of the Interim Transvaal Committee of FOSATU, 13 December.

[75] HP: AH1999: C1.1.1. Minutes of the Interim Central Committee Meeting of FOSATU, 11 March 1979.

[76] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', p. 5.

[77] S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 184 and P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', p. 17.

[78] J. Kraak, *Breaking the Chains: Labour in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s*, London, Pluto Press, 1993, p. 184.

[79] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', pp. 22-23.

[80] 'What does FOSATU Stand For,' *FOSATU Worker News*, October 1979.

[81] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', pp. 23.

[82] P. Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU', pp. 21-22.

[83] D. Hemson *et al*, 'White Activists', p. 310.

[84] See J. Maree, 'SAAWU in East London: 1979-1981,' in *SALB*, 7(4): February 1982, pp. 34-49.

[85] J. Maree, 'SAAWU in East', pp. 43 –44.

[86] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', pp. 18-19.

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', p. 20.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] For discussion on the registration debate: see B. Fine *et al*, 'Trade Unions'; WPGWU 'Reply to Fine de Clerq and Innes.' *SALB*, 5 (4): November 1979; F. Haysom, 'In search of concession: reply to Fine et al.' *SALB*, 7 (3): November 1981; A. Hirsch, and M. Nicol, 'Trade Unions and the State- a response,' *SALB*, 7 (3) November 1981; D. Innes, 'Trade Unions and the State: rebutting our critics.' *SALB*, 8 (1): September 1982.

[91] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', p. 22.

[92] 'FOSATU Granted Non-Racial Exemptions,' *FOSATU Worker News*, No. 6, August 1980.

[93] 'Pension Panic', *Fostau Workers News*, October 1980.

[94] P. Bonner, 'Independent Trade Unions', p. 35.

[95] See J. Baskin, 'Germiston Shop-steward's Council, ' in *SALB*, 7 (8): July 1982, pp. 47-51.

Conclusion

The recent work by Sithole and Ndlovu on trade unions in the 1970s have resuscitated the arguments made by SACTU in exile and characterise all the emerging unions, including TUACC, as undemocratic and economistic organisations that 'bordered on the reactionary'.[1] This study contributes to a growing body of literature that rejects such claims and argues that the TUACC was at the forefront of creating a unique organisational style that was profoundly democratic and radical in nature and laid the foundations for the policies and strategies developed by FOSATU and later COSATU.

One of the key difficulties with Sithole and Ndlovu is that they severely limit the terms of debate and prevent a serious engagement with various actors and ideologies that shaped the emerging unions. Most importantly, they eclipse the role that ordinary members played in building the new unions. Drawing on some of the observations made by Buhlungu about the making of a democratic trade union culture in South Africa, this study maintains that the policies and strategies adopted by the TUACC, which were forged in the daily struggles of the unions, were the joint product of workers, who drew on their organisational and political traditions, and a diverse layer of activists, who drew on a variety of political ideas.

Initiated by student radicals, activists linked to the Congress Movement and unionists from sympathetic registered unions, the GFWBF drew on the rising militancy of workers in Natal and, from the outset, attracted a relatively large worker base that went on to form the new unions under TUACC. Reflecting complex shifts in the labour market, the TUACC organised a significant proportion of semi-skilled African women in the NUTW and large numbers of unskilled migrants in MAWU and the CWIU. TUACC, which created a framework for affiliates to develop a common strategy and pool resources, initiated much of the workers' control tradition and (in sharp contrast to the claims that the emerging unions were undemocratic) promoted the creation of non-racial and predominately industrial trade unions that were rooted in factory floor organisation and controlled by workers through their elected shop stewards.

The adoption of this organisational strategy was partly informed by student radicals, who were inspired the revolutionary combinations of workers (such as the Paris Commune (1871), Italian Factory Councils (1920) and the British shop stewards' movement (1960s)) and believed that trade unions could only become radical if they were workplace based organisations that were controlled by workers. They also maintained that broad based industrial unions that were united into a national federation could foster interracial unity at the workplace and overcome sectoral divisions. Contrary to the arguments made by Maree and Friedman, however, student radicals were not solely responsible for the creation of democratic shop floor based structures. Largely due to the efforts of SACTU affiliates that established factory committees in a variety of industries during the 1950s and early 1960s in Natal, there was already a tradition of non-racial and democratic trade union organisation in the region. SACTU unionists and workers that were initially schooled in SACTU brought these traditions with them. In addition, particularly migrant workers drew on their own democratic traditions of clandestine workplace organisation and resistance.

Faced with employer and state hostility as well as a lack of resources, the implementation of this organisation strategy proved difficult. One of the key challenges that the TUACC unions had to face, however, was the development of a confident and effective layer of worker leaders. African workers, especially migrants, did not have much formal education and lacked administrative skills. Many were also not fluent in English, the language of business, and did not have the confidence to negotiate with employers. Confirming the arguments made by scholars such as Maree and Buhlungu, workers did become dependent on more educated unionists as a result. Even so, the power of white university trained unionists should not be exaggerated – especially during this formative stage when the unions were unable to sustain specialised posts and all unionists were drawn into the difficult task of organising workers. Moreover, a working class leadership did emerge early on (at the start of the decade). Significantly this leadership included a number of competent African women workers, who were usually employed in semi-skilled positions and who had received more formal education than their migrant counterparts.

The TUACC unions should also not be dismissed as reformist or reactionary and it is necessary to consider the ideas that informed their engagement with employers and the state and their fight for industrial legitimacy. Although the apartheid state was repressive, unionists believed that the character of the state was determined by the balance of power between class forces and, mainly through their struggle for recognition, the TUACC unions developed a Gramscian strategy whereby they sought to enter into legally biding agreements with employers that '…would serve as defensive ramparts for workers in a hostile situation, and as platforms for further advances once conditions improved'.[2] They also attempted to exploit loopholes in the law and use workplace committees and other industrial relations structures, which they could only access through sympathetic registered unions, to defend the existing rights of workers, gain a foothold in factories and advance their struggle for workers' rights. This strategy was consolidated through TUACC's dealings with NUMARWOSA and the UAW, which demonstrated that strong and democratic unions could work within industrial structures without undermining union autonomy or democratic shop-floor organisation.

Workers, were very weary of works and liaison committees, which partly accounts for TUACC's initial reluctance to participate in these structures, and proved keen on guarding the independence of their organisations, especially from management. At the same time, workers feared victimisation from their employers and the state. Most workers joined unions to advance their rights and defend their dignity and, along with union intellectuals, recognised that the survival of the unions was based on gaining some form legitimacy.[3] It was partly due to the search for additional protection against employers and state repression that workers in TUACC turned to traditional leaders and homeland politicians for assistance.

The political position of TUACC is difficult to assess. As many authors note, the TUACC unions distanced themselves from banned organisations, mainly to avoid the unions from being smashed before they had a chance to consolidate. The failure to enter into a formal alliance with the Congress movement did not necessarily mean that the TUACC unions were economistic. Authors such as Maree, Webster and Lambert maintain that the unions

challenged existing power relations and posed a threat to racial capitalism. In the second instance, Friedman argues that the everyday factory struggles and democratic trade union structures were political in that they demonstrated that change was possible and gave black workers the opportunity to make decisions and the confidence to change their world. It can also be added that the notion that workers' should control their unions also implicitly raised broader political questions about workers' control over society.

Finally, Baskin notes that activists in the unions were motivated by broader political concerns. Many unionists, including those linked to SACTU and the Congress Movement, maintained that the time had come to rebuild political resistance inside the country and that the unions would serve as a battering ram against apartheid. It has also been noted that radical white students were influenced by socialist thinkers and called for a workers movement that could promote the political and economic interests of workers, even after independence was achieved. This does not necessarily mean that white student radicals downplayed national liberation, as argued by Buhlungu. Rather, they did not want to see the workers' movement subordinated to cross-class nationalist organisations and argued that workers should struggle for national rights on their own terms.

Most socialists, including Anarcho-syndicalists, maintain that militant and democratic unions do not automatically give rise to revolutionary consciousness and the political ideas of workers in TUACC proved contradictory. On the one hand, workers were instrumental to the creation of a democratic trade union culture predicated on socialist notions of workers control. Yet, on the other hand, workers also supported populist movements such as Inkatha and did not contest the more autocratic aspects of traditional political structures. Union leaders in Natal, however, did not provide a clear political alternative and it is only once the TUACC became established on the Witwatersrand that a groups of intellectuals articulated a clear political position that was later adopted by FOSATU.

One of the key weaknesses of this study is that it does not include the voices of the worker members of TUACC and a proper social history of the emerging unions, which

takes the views and experiences of ordinary members into account, is still required. Nevertheless, this study raises a number of interesting themes that require further investigation. Firstly, the transmission of political ideas within the unions needs to be examined. How did the union impact on the consciousness of the rank and file and how were political ideas spread? Second, generation needs to be considered. The unions reflected the emergence of a more politically assertive generation of youth and the role of these youth in reviving workers' organisations need further investigation. There are also indications that there were generational differences within the union movement and that young workers were at the forefront of creating a militant workers culture. Lastly, although this study notes that women workers took up leadership positions, the way in which gender relations and identities shaped organisation requires much reflection.

According to van der Linden the 'New Labour History' as developed by social historians is giving way to 'Global Labour History', which questions the nation state as a primary unit of analysis and encourages historians to study the working class in a broader transnational and transcontinental context.[4] Gay Seidman, who compares the labour movement it Brazil and South Africa in the 1980s, as well as Sithole and Ndlovu and Martin Legassick, who look at the relationship between SACTU in exile and the emerging unions, have already started to highlight some international dimensions of the emerging unions. There is still much that can be done in this field. The failure of the militant labour movements that emerged in the newly industrialised countries (such as South Africa, Brazil and Poland) during the 1970s and 1980s to transcend their national concerns and create an alternative international movement that broke out of the bounds of Cold War politics is of particular interest.

Notes: Conclusion

[1] J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival', p. 232.

[2] P. Bonner, 'Independent Unions Since', p. 23.

[3] E. Webster, 'A Profile of', p. 52-53.

[4] See van der Linden, 'Globalising Labour Historiography, the IISA Approach, International Institute of Social History, 2002; M. van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History*: *explorations*, Ashgate: Hants and Burlington, 2003; M. van der Linden, 'Labour History: the Old, the New and the Global', unpublished paper presented at 'Rethinking the Worlds of Labour, History Workshop and SWOP, University of the Witwatersrand, July 2006.

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