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Title: The Re-Emergence of Political Unionism in contemporary South Africa?

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THE RE-EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL UNIONISM IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA?

The racially based South African state has always served to buttress severe forms of labour exploitation. It has been, historically and in contemporary struggles, a cardinal force shaping the form, character and goals of the progressive, non-racial, trade union movement. This is not to imply that the state was, and is, a determining force in this regard. Such theorization would deemphasize the dimension of leadership and the potential choices that emerge within tactical and strategic debates. Our own approach in attempting to assess the direction and potential of contemporary trade unionism in South Africa, would be to assert the critical importance of these tactical and strategic debates.

We would argue that fundamental differences in the perceptions of the trade union role exist, differences that have divided the trade union movement since unions first emerged in nineteenth-century Europe. The division lies between those who discern significant potential in trade union activity, and those who argue that such activity does not in itself facilitate (indeed some hold that it may even inhibit) the transformation of capitalist society. Hyman refers to the former as the optimistic tradition and the latter as the pessimistic tradition.(1) These differences need to be thoroughly debated, for they do have consequences for the choices trade unions make in the face of the unfolding of the state's reform strategy.

Our central argument holds that two approaches exist in the non-racial trade union movement at present: orthodox, or collective bargaining unionism, and political, or, social movement unionism. By orthodox unionism, we mean a form of trade unionism which concentrates almost exclusively on workplace issues; fails to link production issues to wider political issues; and finally encourages its members to become politically involved without necessarily engaging itself in the wider political arena, believing that this is best left to other organizations more suited to the task. The political content of such unionism varies widely, but in each instance what is common to this orientation is an accommodation and absorption into industrial relations systems, which not only institutionalize conflict, but also serves to reinforce the division between economic and political forms of struggle so essential to the maintenance of capitalist relations, in production, in the community and in the state.

The alternate tendency - political, or social movement unionism - attempts to link production to wider political issues. It is a form of union organization that facilitates an active engagement in factory-based, production politics, and in community and state power issues. It engages in alliances in order to establish relationships with political organizations on a systematic

basis. We would contrast this form of trade unionism with what we call populist unionism in which trade unionism and struggles in the factory are downplayed. The latter is a tendency that neglects struggles over wages, supervision, managerial controls at the workplace and job evaluation; and places in its stead a political engagement that only serves to dissipate tough struggle in these areas. This is not political unionism at all, for political unionism attempts to link the above struggles with community and state power issues. Unlike syndicalism, our definition of political unionism does not negate the role of a political party, but rather asserts the need for a coordinating political body that is democratic in its practices and therefore able to relate to political unionism in a non-instrumental manner.

Political unionism emerged within SACTU in the 1950s, indicating an orientation that held real promise not only for challenging the apartheid state, but also for generating a worker consciousness. It was formed in 1955 as a predominantly African trade union federation drawing on the defunct CNETU - a federation which had concentrated exclusively on collective bargaining - but included amongst its affiliates the 'left' non-racial strand of the registered trade union movement formerly organised in the Trades and Labour Council. SACTU's alliance with the ANC and the Congress movement resulted in a novel redefinition of its trade union role along the lines of 'political unionism'. Faced by a weak power base in the factories, a hostile state

and intransigent employers, SACTU chose to engage politically with nationalism as a means of transforming its small factory base.

Extensive research into SACTU's development during the late '50s reveals that it grew most rapidly in those regions where political unionism was consciously pursued.(2) Political unionism coexisted with orthodox unionism within SACTU, despite the general commitment of the federation to political struggle through the alliance. Some have argued that this engagement in the alliance led to the subordination of the trade unions and working class demands to nationalism, or populism. We would argue to the contrary: engagement in the alliance facilitated the rapid development of trade union organization, where attention was paid to the importance of factory structures and production politics. This is not to deny that in certain unions and in certain regions populist unionism existed. However, the most systematic organizing work within SACTU was along the lines of social movement, or political unionism.

The 1950s' experiment in political unionism hardly had time to consolidate before it was preempted by the state repression of the mid 1960s. South Africa was to experience a decade of industrial peace. However , it was a decade in which the economy experienced a structural transformation financed by a massive influx of foreign

capital, accelerated expansion of industry, a restructuring of capital and the growing concentration and centralisation of ownership. The extent of cartelisation by the late 1970s may be gauged by the information supplied by the Mouton Commission on monoplies in 1977. According to the commission a mere 5% of the total number of firms in the manufacturing sector between them accounted for 63% of the sector's turnover; only 5% of those in wholesale accounted for 69% of turnover; 5% of those in construction accounted for 63% of turnover; and 5% in transport for 73% of turnover.(3)

Coupled with these changes went a corresponding growth in the black working class which brought black workers firmly to the centre of the industrial stage . In particular, we see the growth in the number of semi-skilled black workers, the organisational base for industrial unionism. As Hemson writes,

> ° With the growth of monopoly capitalism and the concentration of production in large-scale, highly mechanised factories, went a black proletariat neither differentiated by traditional skills, nor having experienced the benefits of reform. These are the conditions for a rapid advance in class consciousness as the political resistance to apartheid gains momentum '.(4)

By concentrating large numbers of workers in production, the material conditions for a strengthened shop-floor-based trade unionism had been created by the early 1970s. It was the mass strikes in January and February 1973 in Durban that were to dramatically highlight these changes: an estimated 100,000 workers broke the decade of 'industrial peace' and took to the

streets to demand wage increases.

Managerial consultants and state strategists were forced to place "the worker", on the agenda as militancy destroyed comforting myths and exposed the weaknesses of the 50-year-old dualistic system of industrial relations that conceded certain rights to non-Africans, while at the same time excluding African workers. The exclusion from these rights under the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act, was reinforced by a unilateral system of control over black workers that rested on the despotic power of the supervisor.

This despotic regime inside the factory was backed up by a tight system of control exercised by the state through influx control over black workers outside the firm. This dualistic system of control entrenched a dualism in the labour market - between a predominantly skilled and privileged white labour aristocracy, and a non-unionised and vulnerable black and unskilled labour force.

This system was to trigger off a crisis of control in the 1970s. The crisis was a result of a multiplicity of forces, both economic and political, that led to challenges on the shop floor to the managerially controlled liaison system. The shop-floor-based unions that emerged in the early 1970s eschewed political action outside of production. They believed that it was important to avoid the path taken by SACTU in the 1950s. They argued that its close

identification with the Congress Alliance and its campaigns was the cause of its demise in the 1960s. The emerging unions chose to devote their attention to building democratic shopfloor structures around the principle of worker control, accountability and mandating of worker representatives, as a basis for developing a working class leadership in the factories. This strategy was justified in two ways. First, strong shopfloor organisation had a better chance of surviving state repression which would be directed in the first instance at 'leaders'. Second, they argued that at least until 1980-81, its political impact would have been insignifiant, whilst at the same time, these fledgling unions had everything to lose by adopting a confrontationist stance.

These challenges were to culminate in the establishment of the Wiehahn Commission to investigate industrial relations in 1977. Arising out of this investigation, the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended to allow for the recognition of black unions for the first time in South African labour history. It would be better, Wiehahn concluded, to allow African trade unions to register at an early stage in order to control the pace of union development.

The Wiehahn solution was clearly contradictory. The intention was to control the emerging unions by drawing them into the established industrial relations structures, in

particular the Industrial Councils, thus pre-empting these unions' attempts to establish a shop floor presence and to widen the scope of their activities into "non industrial relations" arenas. This required giving unregistered unions state recognition, enabling them to win space in their attempt to move beyond the struggle for recognition to direct negotiation at shop floor level. Recognition at plant level was not won without struggle, but in the years immediately after Wiehahn, a new frontier of control was being defined as recognition agreements at plant level became increasingly common in different sectors of the economy.

In the immediate post-Wiehahn period, South Africa's industrial relations practioners embarked on the difficult task of attempting to integrate black workers' demands into the new collective bargaining system. Their aim was to institutionalise industrial conflict along classical pluralist lines. The oft-stated intention was the patterning of union development along West European lines, where unions confine themselves to workplace issues only. Political engagement is left to political parties, which individual unions may attempt to influence. State strategists saw the concession of collective bargaining rights as the first step in a gradual reform process that would culminate in certain, yet-to-be determined, political rights for blacks. The unacceptable alternative for the apartheid state was a radical politicization of labour with an overtly political trade

union movement engaged with the national liberation movement.

It is now seven years since the state introduced these reforms - enough time for a tentative evaluation as to just how successful the strategists have been in attaining their goals. Nearly two million workers - black and white - now belong to trade unions affiliated to two major federations - CUSA-AZACTU and COSATU. How effective has the state been in patterning union development along 'pure' collective bargaining lines? To what extent have the new unions been absorbed into the industrial relations system in a way that institutionalizes the separation between economic and wider political struggle?

The paper is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with the gains made in collective bargaining in the post-Wiehahn period. Part 2 traces the re-emergence of alliance politics in the trade union movement. Part 3 examines some of the obstacles to this alliance.
In this paper we concentrate on developments in COSATU and one of its predecessors, FOSATU.

PART 1 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UNIONISM

In our view, the results of the reform strategy are contradictory. On the one hand, it would <u>appear</u> that significant gains are being made in the immediate post-Wiehahn period in developing a system of collective bargaining along

traditional industrial relations lines. They can be summarised as follows :

1) An estimated 20% of the labour force now belong to trade unions. A major contributing factor to this growth has been the dramatic growth of the National Union of Mineworkers. The foundations for national-based industrial trade unions have now been laid in all major sectors of the economy.

2). Perhaps more significant was the organisational depth of these emerging unions. By the end of 1985, these unions were organised in 3 500 workplaces, had signed 450 plant agreements, had an estimated 1 500 shop steward committees/councils and over 12 500 shop stewards.

3) Management's unilateral power to dismiss has been curtailed by the emergence of a system of industrial legality in the workplace, laying down a set of procedures to be followed in the event of dismissal or retrenchment. These procedures have been strengthened by the dramatic increase in the use of the Industrial Court by trade unionists from 20 in 1981 to over 2 000 in 1986.

4) Strikes are beginning to become a normal part of the collective bargaining process, losing many of the sinister implications attached to them in the past. This is possibly best illustrated by the growth in the number of mediations

by the Independent Mediation Service of S.A., from 39 in 1984 to 131 in 1986. Most strikes continued to be over wages. However, dismissals, retrenchment, recognition and detention were a major cause of strike action. Of particular interest is the growing sophistication in the range of tactics used by workers from go-slows and over-time bans, to factory occupations and sit-ins.

5) The post-Wiehahn period has seen the beginning of serious collective bargaining in S.A. Many of the emerging unions have now joined the Industrial Councils and have begun to draw on the skills of professional economists in their negotiations. In addition to wage bargaining, a number of other issues that have previously been the prerogative of management, such as health and safety, have become industrial relations issues.

6) In the post-Wiehahn period, the state has begun to withdraw from two key areas of the labour market - from all forms of statutory job reservation except the mines and more ambiguiously, from the pass laws in June 1986. The latter establishes freedom of movement as a nominal right only - residence in urban areas still depends on 'approved accomodation.' The state now controls movement through such 'racially neutral' legislation as the Slums Act, Trespassers Act and Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act. Rather than controlling the movement of people into the urban areas through the pass laws, Cobbett

possibilities, they are also contradictory in a less apparent sense. In fighting for, and advancing in this way, the new unions are increasingly drawn into an industrial relations web, that is not without cost. Collective bargaining, per se, comes to dominate. The struggle becomes defined in terms of the factory only; immediate economic and production politics issues absorb all energy, and the wider political questions begin to fade into a more distant realm that seems beyond the capacity of a union to engage; political engagement is reduced to purely rhetorical flourishes.

We would argue that there are objective social pressures from the state and from capital, pulling the democratic unions in this direction so that the impact of these gains is both transformative and conservative. On the one hand militant industrial unions have made real, albeit limited gains for their members, while on the other they have channelled conflict in ways that can be contained and institutionalized by the industrial relations system. The state has made gains in establishing a collective bargaining system that, as with all such systems, can seal off reasonably effectively economic from political struggles. This is not a startling conclusion. Capitalist states have been relatively effective in containing trade union pressures and actions within acceptable boundaries.

While the state has attained a degree of success in this regard, it has also seriously undermined its own reform programme. Historically, capitalist reforms have only

gained a reasonable degree of success when collective bargaining concessions were backed by political rights, as happened in 19th century Britain. The institutionalisation of industrial conflict presupposes the early (and relatively peaceful) attainment of formal social and political rights by significant sectors of the working population.

Production as a consequence, Wood argues, ceases to be an immediate political issue.(7) The roots of 'economism'lie in this necessary shift of conflict to the point of production. The struggle over appropriation appears not as a political struggle, Wood argues, but as a battle over the terms and conditions of work. In South Africa, the state's intervention in production makes its racial form clear for all to see, linking directly the politics of production with global politics. Although Wiehahn foresaw the necessity for political rights, the South African state has been unable to move in a direction that is acceptable to the black majority. The contradiction in the Wiehahn reforms is now clear - it created the legal space for the rapid growth of industrial unions while failing to provide the conditions for their political incorporation. Instead of accepting the universal franchise which has always served as a useful integrating mechanism, the state has moved hesitantly towards a racially based restructuring that still excludes Africans, while maintaining white control. This has led to an intensification of the demand for national liberation. At the same time, the recession has deepened, producing high levels of youth unemployment. It is above all this social category - along

with students - that has led township resistance since 1976.

Trade unions have therefore been more sharply confronted with a dual challenge since 1984: they have been forced to confront the question of national liberation, and they have been forced to relate to the youth-led civil war in the townships. These pressures have forced union leaderships to think through the relationship between trade union, factory-based struggles, and broader political struggle. The resolution of this central question has been twofold: firstly, certain unions have thrown their resources into broader-based resistance; secondly, a vigorous debate has opened up within the unions, which still leaves a more strategically thought out response to the question of the trade union role and the precise form and content of national liberation unresolved for the present.

PART 2 THE RE-EMERGENCE OF ALLIANCE POLITICS.

The economy has been in recession since 1982, resulting in closures, retrenchments and mass unemployment. The falling rand has fueled internal inflation and threatened the balance of payments. For the state, the effect has been to provoke a major fiscal crisis which in turn restricts its ability to finance 'reform'.(8).

The crisis has been met by unprecedented levels of mobilisation and resistance in the factories and communities over economic and political issues: the highest strike levels in South African history; rent strikes; bus boycotts; consumer boycotts; school boycotts; anti-constitiional campaigns and stay-aways; all these forms of resistance became permanent features of the political terrrain between 1984 and 1986. Moreover, this phase of resistance has been marked by new organisational, ideological and political alignments. This was most clearly evident in November 1984 when unions, community as well as student organisations joined together in the massive Transvaal stay-away.

This is not to say that a struggle within the union movement to define its political role began only after 1984. This would ignore earlier attempts to engage politically and the

interesting debates that accompanied these struggles.

The debate over the relationship between trade unions and politics was to re-emerge in 1979, when the Food and Canning Workers Union called on the community to support their union in a dispute with management in the Fattis and Monis plant in the Cape. Later that year the formation of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) was to force community issues onto the shop floor when African workers in the Ford Cortina plant went out on strike in support of their community leader, Tozamile Botha. This was to lead, in 1980, to the establisment of MACWUSA which, along with the formation of SAAWU in East London a year earlier, forced the unions to confront national politics.

The Food and Canning Workers Union argued in an article written in 1982 that while there was a need to become involved in community issues, a separate form of organisation was required:

° We do believe that separate forms of organisation are needed for these struggles. A trade union is not a community or political organisation. A union which tries to be a community or political organisation at the same time cannot survive'.(9)

At the same time FOSATU entered the debate with a keynote speech by their General Secretary, Joe Foster. Foster's speech called for the building of a workers' movement, much more broadly defined than simple collective bargaining trade unionism. It made provision for alliances and joint campaigning with other progressive organisations and called

on union members to become involved in community and political organisations. However, Foster went on to warn against unions' being drawn into political action which was not worker controlled but was °populist ' in character. Anti-populism was to remain an important political perspective of many of the FOSATU unions.

Foster's speech reaffirmed the principles of worker control but now applied these to political action beyond production. However, the guidelines set down were of a general nature, allowing for very different interpretations: the criticism of populism reinforced a narrow ° workerism' in some quarters; the provision for alliances and community involvement was welcomed by those with national democratic leanings; whilst references to ° workers control ' were interpreted by the SACP as a form of syndicalism.

The debate came to focus on whether or not trade unions should affiliate to the United Democratic Front, newly formed in 1983. Unions such as MACWUSA and SAAWU articulated a position which favoured affiliation on the grounds that workers were also members of the community, and that unions must also fight for their members' interests outside of production. They also argued that trade unions encompassed only a part of the working class, and further that a successful political challenge to the state demanded alliances with other social groups, and the widest possible unity of those who are oppressed under apartheid. The GWU on

the other hand, asserted the need to ensure democratic structures and worker control. The argument was that the UDF was made up of activist-based organisations, with no structures for mandating and acountabilty. The trade unions would be swamped by a host of organisations, with equal voting power, but often little real membership. Furthermore, the UDF represented a multi-class alliance. Its very style and language were at variance with the traditions established in the unions, and did not contribute towards working class leadership. These arguments became the rallying cry of the anti-populist tendency.

While these issues were being debated, new forms of organisation began to emerge on the ground. On the East Rand, the shop stewards councils spearheaded agitation against the destruction of shacks by the authorities. In the Eastern Cape - and to a lesser extent in the Western Cape and Natal - trade unions played a major role in the anti-tricameral election campaign in 1984. In the same year FOSATU locals led by certain FOSATU unions began to meet with student and youth organisations to exchange views. Simultaneously, community-based subsistence struggles led by unionised workers - as in the case of the one-and-a-half year long East London bus boycott - pointed to the possiblity of a more direct role for unions in politics.

However, these efforts remained localised and partial. In

the main, trade unions did not develop a unified national approach to the question of political action . The movement reained divided in its approach : the community unions , particularly SAAWU , engaged in direct confrontation with the authorities (the Ciskei 'government'especially) . Some Fosatu unions such as SFAWU and MAWU moved cautiously onto this terrain on the local level. Others , such as the NUTW, maintained an anti-populist stance , concentrating on collective bargaining issues in the factory. Foster's speech was not concretised , leaving a political vaccuum and intensifying divisions inside the labour movement.

The development of shop steward councils during this period illustrates the contradictions and political hesitancy at this stage. Shop steward councils in East Rand townships such as Katlehong, grouped shop stewards who lived in the same area, but who worked in different factories and in different industries. They took up township problems as well as organizing solidarity for particular factory struggles. There was a strong tinge of syndicalism in their politics: unions could extend their structures into the community and embrace all issues. However, while FOSATU generally took a positive attitude to this development , these councils failed to develop a structured response to the township and wider political problems.(10). Significantly when UMMAWSA split from MAWU in June 1984 , the break was justified in terms of MAWU's and FOSATU's

alleged lack of political involvement and leadership.

By August 1984, when the SADF invaded the townships , the industrial unions were facing numerous pressures that forced them to reconsider their organisational and political strategies. On the one hand , there was increasing militancy on the shop-floor as strike levels escalated , while on the other hand , there was a need to consolidate their organisational capacity in the face of a deepening recession. In addition, the crisis in the townships and the general level of nation-wide political mobilisation had forced the unions to take an appropriate stand. Organised workers demanded a direct involvement in the struggle for political rights and urban change. However, in the absence of one united national trade union federation, there was no unified strategy in response to these pressures. Consequently, strategies were shaped at a local level. This can best be illustrated through the first-hand accounts of activists in a particular area - we will focus on the East Rand after the invasion of the townships in August 1984 but similar processes were at work in other townships in the Transvaal such as Alexandra.

The SADF invasion of the townships had a dramatic impact on the lives of workers, as the journey between township and factory became extremely hazardous. A SFAWU shop steward from Tembisa township spoke of the new set of questions this

posed for the unions:

> "The streets of the township are (normally) more or less flat with lots of people moving up and down all the time. Then the soldiers came carrying guns and raiding the houses. They would just come in without permission. When they tried to put the rents up from the 1st of August, pamphlets were distributed calling for a rent boycott. At night the SADF raided the houses of those not paying rent and took whole families to the police station. They would release one and tell him to go and get the rent.
>
> It was a terrible experience. We had no voice. All the community organizations had been banned. We had no platform to raise issues and we realized that the trade union was our only platform. We had to learn to use our power at the workplace on these issues".(11)

In the ensuing months, workers did use their workplace power. This took the form of stay aways. In this the student organization, COSAS, was a catalyst. When student demands were not met, COSAS took the initiative and called for support from community and trade union organizations. A positive relationship existed between youth and sections of the organized workforce as a result of the Simba Chips boycott that served to establish a working relationship between youth and employed workers. As a shop steward commented,

> "This was an eye opener to many of the workers who had not taken youth seriously. For instance, I discussed with some of the youth in the townships and I was surprised to hear them talking in terms of class struggle and being clearer than many of the workers themselves".(12)

Unions and community organizations responded to the COSAS call. They set up parent-student committees in a number of townships. In the Transvaal between August - November 1984, a working relationship between community/student

organisations and trade unions began to emerge. This led to the November 1984 stay-away. It was the beginning of united mass action between organised labour, students and community organisations, with unions sometimes taking a leading role. For key sectors of the democratic union movement, it marked a decisive break with absentionism. The sheer scale of the stay-away must be understood in terms of the build-up of conflict and struggle in three key areas - the townships, the schools and the factories.
(See appendix 1 : black workers' stayaways 1984 - 1986.)

The significance of this joint action is that alliance politics were being forged in the process of intensified struggle , where workers confronted the township crisis daily, rather than in refined political debate as to the problems of populism. Organized workers, students, unemployed youth, and other township activists gained experience in working together as they faced issues daily: township rents and the need for an organized response to this crisis; police and army action, arrests, deaths of 'comrades' and the need to organize funerals and local stay-aways in protest.

This was to begin a process of redefinition of the trade union role and prioritized the question of national liberation. These pressures were moving sections of the trade union movement towards political unionism. It was however only the beginnings of a process that would require systematic

debate and a more permanent structured response, rather than ad hoc relationships in response to particular problems. Also, other areas, particularly in Natal, that did not experience township occupations as in the Transvaal, did not move in the same way. The emergence of political unionism was therefore partial, uneven and embryonic at this point in time. It was still as if the union movement was being pulled in opposite directions: a primary focus on the factory and the need to bargain more effectively, win higher wages, preempt dismissals, resist retrenchments; a focus on township issues that could no longer be ignored. The problem at this point was that the union leadership was divided on how to respond to this. One union General Secretary commented,

> "The situation is getting out of hand. Township issues are distracting us from our real work as trade unionists".(13)

In contrast to this negative response that saw in every township involvement another example of "nationalism dragging the trade union movement along by its shirt tails", others were far more positive in their assessment. For them, the township demands had led to a creative response on the part of organized labour, a response that opened the way for the union movement to engage with national liberation. The issue of the trade union role remained in the melting pot - its direction undecided. Much depended upon whether, and on what basis, a new

unity could be created.

While November 1984 was an historically important moment in which united mass action took place , during the coming months a number of obstacles and problems emerged which inhibited the realisation of this potential unity. Many of these problems came to the fore when the non-UDF unions opposed the PEBCO call for a Black Week-end consumer boycott (March 16/17 1985) and a stay-away (March 18 , 1985) as a response to the political and economic crisis in the Eastern Cape. PEBCO identified the following issues: mass retrenchments , the AMCA-Ford merger and increased petrol prices, with the last becoming the final focus of the stay-away.

The non-UDF unions gave a number of reasons for opposing the stay-away at that time. In particular , their public statements were concerned that a call made by PEBCO - an African community organisation - would exclude 'coloured ' workers; a local response to what was a national problem was likely to be ineffective ; there was inadequate consultation with the workers ; and workers in smaller and unorganised establishemnts would be vulnerable.

In the event , the stay-away was successful among African workers but had limited success among 'coloureds '(See Appendix 1.).These differences reflect the reality of a divided working class - divisions that find organisational expression in the previous division between PEBCO and the FOSATU trade unions . In addition , the recession -

particularly severe in the auto industry which has been concentrated in the Eastern Cape - affected workers in different ways. While unions such as NAAWU were concerned to consolidate their position - seeking to preserve jobs and the gains already made through collective bargaining - unemployed workers , many of whom were members of the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress - PEYCO - played an important role in the mass protests in the townships.

This again illustrates that the emergence of social movement unionism is not necessarily a smooth progression from one form to another. During this phase, instances of a tense and conflictual relationship between trade unions committed to collective bargaining gains, and community organizations striving to assert a wider political engagement, were not uncommon. Transcending this divide would be a central challenge that the newly formed federation, COSATU, would have to face.

The launch of COSATU in December 1985 represented a broad shift of key trade unions towards a more direct concern with non-factory issues. COSATU identified publicly with the national liberation struggle early in 1986 after a visit by a COSATU delegation to Lusaka. The joint ANC-SACTU-COSATU statement acknowledged the independent existence of COSATU, while at the same time viewing trade unions as an essential component of the national struggle.

"As a representative of our working class, COSATU

> is seized with the task of engaging the workers in the general democratic struggle, both as an independent organization and as an essential component of the democratic forces in our country".(14)

This statement of intent by the COSATU leadership, based on the November 1985 Congress resolutions, was an attempt to come to terms with the crisis in the townships. Essentially, this meant thinking through the relationship with the national liberation movement and the relationship between students, unemployed youth and the organized workforce.

The SFAWU National Executive Committee had, in an earlier discussion paper influenced by the events on the East Rand in 1984/ 85, attempted to come to grips with this issue. The document argued that in the context of a deepening economic and political crisis, the country had entered a

"phase of uninterrupted struggle. It is the youth who are at the vanguard of that struggle. It is the youth that are demanding through their struggles fundamental change and a restructuring of society. In this flow of struggle the organized power of workers is crucial".(15)

The document continued:

> "Township struggles are being waged and determined by youth...who also constitute a major part of the masses of the unemployed".

There was therefore a need to work for a "convergence" of workplace and township forms of struggle, rather than the existing situation where such struggles were being waged in parallel.

The document argued further that such alliances should only

be formed on a principled, or disciplined basis, that is, the union movement should spell out the terms upon which it is prepared to enter such an alliance. These terms should include a recognition of the following:

> the right of workers to control society, since they produced the wealth; consequently other groups in an alliance would have to recognize that the interests of workers could not be subordinated to the interests of other social classes.

During 1986 the COSATU leadership began to spell out what such control could mean in practice. It would emerge, they believed, out of the organizing style that the unions had developed.(16). This was based on the "absolute control" that workers exercised over all "decision-making in the organization". This could be achieved through constitutions that entrenched such a principle; through shop steward elections in each department of a shop, factory or mine; through such leaders' only acting on the basis of mandates from the membership and regular report backs; and by structures of the unions that would incorporate a worker majority at all levels. This, COSATU believed, would lay the basis for developing an "alliance between students, youth and worker parents", that would point the way foward to "people's power", that is, the power of an alliance of classes, rather than the working class striving on its own. This required the development of forms of organization appropriate to the different terrains of struggle. These included SRCs in the schools, civics in the townships, unions in the factories and the organization of an

unemployed workers union, so that the various spheres of struggle could be linked and not "fought on isolated and individual fronts".

PART 3 CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

How did this strategy unfold during 1986? COSATU has encounterd a number of challenges in attempting to put into practice alliance politics: strong opposition to alliance politics on the part of a section of COSATU; further debate amongst the larger COSATU affiliates as to the precise content of the general principles outlined by the leadership; the failure to meet the unrealistic deadline of one union one industry within six months; an ongoing search for appropriate forms of organization for the unemployed ; and finally, meeting the challenge of the state of emergency and debate forms of self defence that could be effective under the new conditions.

Opposition to alliance politics was to emerge openly in the months following the COSATU launch among a section of the leadership that were critical of COSATU's new political direction. They charged that this new political direction was "misdirected", and that this "rush" to espouse "alliance politics" might result in a situation where years of painstaking work might be swept aside and the working class again be without democratic trade unions. (17) The essence

of the argument is that populism and nationalism, which have gained increasing support during the current crisis, stand in absolute contradiction to a working class politics. The organizational styles and political content of each are so different, it is argued, that any involvement of the working class in such politics can mean only one thing: the abandonment of independence and with it the abandonment of working class politics. Alliance politics which stresses "the people" and not the working class is a non-class based politics that fails to prepare the workers for socialism. Unions that become embroiled in populist campaigns will lose their organizational independence, because they will find themselves unable to control such campaigns. Populist organizations, it is argued, are anti-democratic in character because the actions of the 'leaders' are not accountable, as no recognizable membership exists.

The anti-populists are also concerned with what they see as the inability of the unions to control the "confrontationist" strategy of the populists. The personal attacks of some of COSATU leadership on Buthelezi is cited as an example of the consequences of such a strategy as it has caused problems for unionists in Natal. These practices, it is argued, will "exhaust" the unions rather than their opponents as unionists get "dragged into each and every adventurous action that is initiated". Critics of alliance politics have seen evidence of such 'adventurous action' in the poor response to COSATU's call for a 'day of

action' on the 14th July 1986 to protest against the State of Emergency.

Increasingly, the larger unions have been far more interested in giving specific content to the rather general and abstract principles outlined by the COSATU leadership in its early phase than debating whether or not alliances are in the interests of the working class. Such debate now centres on the form such alliances should take, the definition of socialism, and its relationship to national struggle. The Metal and Allied Workers Union , for example, at its congress in July 1986 committed itself to building socialism in South Africa in a struggle spearheaded by the working class. The resolution argued that :

> Worker leaders are increasingly playing a leading role in the community. The lack of initiatives, and the confusion that exists within the community itself on political issues arises from the lack of a working class programme.

The union went on to set itself the task in the coming period,° of beginning to define what we mean by socialism'.(18)

Similarly , the leadership of NUM at their congress in March 1987 began to give content to their notion of alliance politics by inviting Winnie Mandela, wife of the jailed ANC leader and Honorary President of NUM, Nelson Mandela, and Murphy Morobe, acting publicity Secretary of the UDF, to speak at the opening of the congress. James Motlatsi, NUM President, spelt out his understanding of the political direction

of the union:

> Attempts by the governemnt to impose the tricameral parliament system and community councils have failed totally. Its reform plans have been met with large scale opposition from every part of the country - urban and rural. Today the state 's plans lie in ruins.....Only a democratic socialist order , which uses the country's resources for the benefit of its people will solve the crisis. ..... We must build firm , discplined and effective alliances with the democratic organisations.(19)

It is significant that these debates are taking place amongst the larger, industrially-based affiliates of COSATU, for it is here that real power lies. This power consolidated during 1986, when mergers took place in the transport sector (the merger of TGWU with GWU to form the new TGWU) the food sector(the FCWU ,SFAWU and RAWU into the FAWU), and the absorption of a plastic union in the Western Cape into the CWIU. Although COSATU failed to meet its ambitious deadline, the principle of mergers has now taken hold. A major merger in the metal industry is expected soon; a S.A. Railway and Harbour Workers Union, which will merge into TGWU, has now been launched, as has the new construction union, CAWU; plans are proceeding with a nation-wide agricultural union.

Apart from consolidating power industrially, the crucial issue of the relationship of organized workers with the unemployed remains. While difficult to avoid, it remains a challenge that union movements in other societies with substantial welfare state provisions, have not had to confront in any concrete organizational sense. At present,

the potential for real tension exists between organized and politicized, unemployed youth, and unionized workers. Political oppression has compounded the generational tensions in township households. The attitude of the youth is complex and contradictory: they recognize that their parents are victims of racial oppression and economic exploitation, and therefore empathize with them; but they blame their parents for not fighting against this with sufficient vigour, and therefore feel anger and frustration at what they perceive to be their parents failings.

> "Our parents still have that old image they grew up under. They tell us that the white man, is a white man, and what he says is final. When we try to argue with our parents they will just say, 'what do you know, you were only born yesterday. You have got to listen to what we are telling you?' We are caught in a trap. What our parents don't seem to have is a desire for us to be better peoples....If you bring your parents in and sit them there, and discuss with them, they just fold their arms and say nothing. So now we do everything for ourselves without consulting our parents because it is useless to speak to a stone".(20)

A potentially antagonistic attitude towards the unions exists among some of the youth:

> "Many unions just ask for wage demands and the reduction of working hours. I know factories where workers just ask for boots and overalls...but don't find there's an importance in the struggle. But we are the highly politized ones. ....We embrace one cause, we understand what the cause is, and we sacrifice, even our lives, because we understand what is actually happening. But workers, ha! If you only receive those boots and those boots are being torn up again, then you will start boycotting the factory and demanding new boots, because this one is a bit old! That is why when we call for actions like stay aways they often don't understand the importance of the stayaway....They are often narrow, and just look at the disadvantages of stayaways. They just say, 'If we don't work for a week, we won't get

> money for that week'. So what they normally do is to take another route and walk through fences and jump those bridges to go to work...If individuals were highly organized and politicized their response would be positive enough. They would be able to sacrifice even for the whole month by staying away from the factories. Liberation would be bought easily. It just depends on how the unions will operate".

The establishment of an organized relationship with the unemployed will doubtlessly ease these tensions as the youth come to understand trade unionism at a deeper level. Much will depend on the way that the trade union movement unfolds in the coming years. An alliance has the potential to ease these tensions. Orthodox unionism will reinforce them. From their vantage point of the streets, youth have no stake in any gradual struggle. The longer the struggle, the longer their misery. Tomorrow, they say, the struggle must be won. It is, some have suggested, a form of 'immediatism'. These are the pressures of the township that many trade union leaders have had to contend with.

After the army occupied the townships, protest became increasingly militaristic as large numbers of youth began engaging the security forces in running street battles that claimed hundreds of lives. The militaristic voluntarism of this section of the youth has sometimes eclipsed the organisational concerns of union activists as the townships have become ungovernable. In these cases trade unionists and community activists have found themselves sandwiched between the militarism of the youth and the terror tactics of the

security forces. Whereas sections of the youth were criticising them for being too moderate, the security forces were hunting them down and detaining or killing them.

However, COSAS youth who have had organizational experience, do recognize the organizational concerns of unions. They recognize the tensions between organization and mobilization, as they themselves are confronted with problems arising from what they regard as the undisciplined actions of unorganized, often anti-social elements in the townships. Once an organized relationship is established, the concerns and the perspectives of trade union leadership could be articulated in a constructive manner. Tensions and potential conflicts could be transformed into interlacing and unified struggle. That is why they believe an alliance is necessary.

COSATU has resolved to establish an unemployed workers union, and the leadership is presently exploring the form that this should take. Unemployed youth are themselves involved in this initiative, which will have a significant bearing on the type of labour movement to emerge in South Africa.

These challenges are being met in the context of the state of emergency and the onslaught of Inkatha in Natal, and right wing vigilante terror in other provinces. The second state of emergency affected COSATU leadership particularly badly . The Labour Monitoring Group's December report

showed that 614 union leaders, about 80 % of them with COSATU links , had been arrested in terms of the emergency regulations.(21) More than half were still in detention. Over 2000 rank-and-file union members suffered the same fate in mass detentions during disputes in the second half of last year. More disturbing was the murder of two MAWU shop stewards as well as some of their relatives at Mpophomeni near Howick on December 5 and 6 1986 by vigilantes reported to be carrying Inkatha flags. The launch of the Inkatha-backed UWUSA in May 1986 in direct organisational and ideological opposition to COSATU has further sharpened divisions in factories in certain parts of Natal .

The most effective response to this onslaught is still being debated. Some are reflecting on whether it would not be wiser to return to collective bargaining unionism.

> "Workers want real gains. They want to be able to see concrete improvements, in wages, in working conditions and in transport. Before the emergency many were caught up in the idea of liberation. It seemed as though we were on the move at last. Now all of that has changed. We must return to tangible gains. Workers can't be kept going on ideas". (23).

Retreat could be one important effect of the Emergency. In some senses such an option would be prudent - real gains, we argued in Part 1 of this paper, have been made by unions in the post-Wiehahn period. Furthermore powerful forces both locally and internationally are encouraging such a direction. One example internationally is the AALC in Washington. In a report, written in May 1986, recommending the criteria that should be used in selecting which unions to give financial support to, the author makes clear that the AFL-CIO should only support °business trade unionism and not ideological trade unionism...(and that they should be) ° careful to avoid any affiliation with the active partisans in the political trade union arena'.(23).

In sharp contrast to this attempt to assert the apolitcal tradition of American °business unionism' is the more creative response of some far-sighted managers who have realised the disruptive effect of political conflict on the delicate industrial relations structures and have tried to mediate in these conflicts in order to absorb them into the collective bargaining structures. This approach takes as

its point of departure the inevitabilty of the 'politicization' of industrial relations because of the lack of political rights in South Africa. Traditional industrial relations theory, it is argued, needs to be adapted to the peculiar conditions of South Africa where mananagment and employees have sufficient common interest to enter into agreements on certain political issues.(24)

Some companies have already begun to put this approach into practice. The 1986 Anglo American Annual Report notes that:

> 'Several companies have taken the initiative in mediating directly between the police and local authorities on the one hand, and company employees, on the other hand, in endeavouring to resolve conflicts which have spilled over into the workplace.'(25).

The benefits of this kind of institutionalisation are clear, writes a background Anglo American document :

> 'by accepting an involvement in problem-solving outside the factory gate, management gains new controls over the conduct of its employees and simultaneously opens up avenues of common interest in which management and its employees can pursue common goals.' (26).

Other managers have embarked on the more conventional path of attempting to pressurise the government into a clearer 'reform' direction. Increasingly alarmed at the spread of radical, even socialist ideas among workers, the business community has stepped up its pressure on the government to remove some key features of apartheid such as the Group Areas Act. The meeting of prominent businessmen with the

African National Congress in late 1985 is both an index of the degree of impatience with the 'pace of reform', as well as the seriousness with which the business community is now exploring and campaigning for their version of a post-apartheid society. The most ambitious attempt to date is the Federated Chamber of Industries Business Charter. Conceived of as an alternative to the Freedom Charter, the Business Charter spells out the principles of a free enterprise economy and society. Importantly, this includes a firm commitment to less involvement of the state in welfare, growing privatisation and deregulation. For some, such as Douwes-Dekker of the Wits Business School, the conditions now exist for an open alliance between management and labour in the form of bilateral agreements involving organised labour and organised capital. This, he believes, will provide the base for moving towards a more effective industrial relations system and ultimately a form of corporatism or social democracy.(27).

Not surprisingly, deep scepticism exists among black workers to any notion of an employer-employee alliance against the apartheid state. The recession has led to a decline in wages in real terms and retrenchment has swelled the ranks of the unemployed putting the trade union movement onto the defensive. Employers have intensified work through work study. This intensification of struggle on the shop floor makes an alliance between unions and employers unlikely.

A more significant reason why such an alliance is unlikely is that employers are seen by black workers as the chief beneficiaries of the apartheid system as well as its driving force. They are sceptical of employers' attempts to distance themselves from apartheid. They point to the fact that this is not the first time that employers have called for the end of apartheid - in the immediate post-Sharpeville period and after Soweto in 1976, employers called for the removal of certain racial laws, only to adapt to the dominant norms once the unrest had subsided. They do not believe that employers have the will or the capacity to remove the apartheid state.(28).

It is significant that NUM has chosen, not to retreat from alliance politics, but rather to begin to spell out what they mean by an alliance. 'Our organisation has taken a political stance because in the five years of its existence it found politics were responsible for our problems', NUM president, James Motlatsi, said at their 1987 congress.(29). This is not only important because of NUM's size but also because the mining industry rests on the political foundations of the apartheid system .

CONCLUSION.

We have attempted to trace some of the social forces that have come to play a part in shaping the trade union role. In our view, the alliance is still embryonic. Powerful forces are determined to break any attempt to link production politics and state politics in the union's strategic programme. The entire security apparatus is in a state of mobilization to try and contain the vigorous movement of resistance that has emerged in the post 1984 period. Managements strive to integrate demands into the industrial relations system. What all these forces have on their side is an objective set of conditions that make orthodox unionism appear to be a more prudent option for union leadership.

But the lack of political rights and the economic recession make such an option diffficult to follow in practice unless certain key demands can be met within the forseeable future. Many of these demands can only be met by a Lancaster House-type negotiated settlement. This is a conclusion that at least some of the businessmen who travelled to Lusaka in 1985 must have come to.

Under the specific conditions of South Africa, a new form of unionism has begun to emerge. Under these conditions the trade unions, in alliance with students, the youth, the unemployed and community groups, have begun to play a

leading role in the struggle for democracy and political rights in society at large. This new form of unionism has the potential to forge an alliance with the popular movement on the basis of equality, and a commitment to defend a working class, socialist programme in a liberated South Africa.

Structural transformations in the South African economy have created this potential.(30). In summary these are:
(1) The establishment of effective structures of collective bargaining through the growth and consolidation of nation-wide mass based industrial trade unions in most sectors of the economy.
(2). Accompanying this has been the growth of fully proletarianised working class communities, including large numbers of militant students and unemployed youth without adequate social infrastructure.
(3).The intervention of the state - particlarly since 1984 and intensified since the State of Emergency - into a range of areas of social life, combined with the lack of political incorporation of the black population, has ensured that localised grievances are soon translated into confrontation with the state. This also, of course, ensures the persistence of the national tradition.

As in Poland with the Solidarity union movement, these unions are now taking up the concerns of working people as a whole, and posing new horisons for trade union work. In

this they are responding to the needs of working people as a whole. Unlike Solidarity, the South African union movement has a greater chance of success because of the relative strength and durabilty of the shop floor structures that have been established in the workplaces. When faced, for example, by a direct state attack on its leadership, as happened during the State of Emergency, some of these unions were able to win significant concessions, such as time off for shop-stewards to run the union offices when certain leaders were detained. This innovative use of collective bargaining structures in the face of political repression has the potential to succeed in the long term, if it is able to retain the gains made on the shop-floor in the post-Wiehahn period, and if present debates and initiatives towards other social groups shift into the realm of structured relationships.

This is the promise of the new union movement in South Africa - and the challenge it poses to managers trained in traditional industrial relations theory and practice, as well as to those in the national movement who see trade unions simply as the transmission belt in a future centrally planned economy.(31).

FOOTNOTES.

1). Hyman, R, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (Pluto Press, London, 1971.)

2). Political unionism is the central focus of Lambert's PHD thesis on SACTU,'Political unionism in South Africa. An analysis of the South African Congress of Trade Unions.'

3). Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Regulation of Monopolistic Conditions Act, 1955, March 1977,RP 64/ 1977.

4). Hemson, D, 'Trade unions and the struggle for liberation', Capital and Class 6 , 1976.

5). Cobbett, W, 'Orderly Urbanisation':Continuity and Change in Influx Control in Popular struggles in South Africa (Forthcoming).

6). Quoted in J Maller ' Wage bargaining in South Africa' South African Review , 4. 1987. (Forthcoming).

7). Wood, E M, 'The separation of the economic and the political in capitalism',New Left Review , No.127.

8). Part 2 of this article is based on joint work done during 1985 and 1986 by members of the Labour Monitoring Group at the University of the Witwatersrand, in particular Stephen Gelb, Jon Lewis, and Mark Swilling.

9). Food and Canning Workers Union, 'Search for a workable Relationship'. South African Labour Bulletin. Vol 7, No.8 , July 1982.

10). The growth of shop steward councils led to two further innovations; the establishment of shop steward committees uniting representatives from different companies and the establishment of shop steward councils for a particular sub-sector such as foundries. The intention behind these innovations was to steer shop steward organisation into collective bargaining structures.

11). Interview , SFAWU shop steward and N.E.C. member, October, 1985.

12). Ibid.

13). Informal discussion with union organiser, May 1985.

14). Joint ANC,SACTU,COSATU statement . South African Labour Bulletin. Vol 11 No.5 May ,1986.

15). Sweet , Food and Allied Workers Union Discussion Paper. August , 1985. We would like to thank those involved in writing this paper for allowing us to quote from it. The quotations that follow are all taken from this document.

16). COSATU General Secretary , Jay Naidoo. ° Building People's Power: a working class perspective', A paper delivered at the Grass roots Conference. 5th May, 1986 .The quotations that follow are from this speech.

17). We have constructed this critique from a number of different sources inside COSATU. The authors prefer to remain anonmyous.

18). South African Metal Worker . Volume 1 Number 4 July 1986.

19). Siluma, M, ° The birth of a new force for change'. The Sunday Star March 1 1987.

20). These extracts are from a national workshop on youth unemployment organised by the Community and Labour Research Group, University of Natal, Durban. Moses Ngoasheng , Rob Lambert and Ari Sitas were involved in organising the workshop from the 2nd to 6th June, 1986.

21). Labour Monitoring Group Report on the effect of the State of Emergency on Industrial Relations. 29 th December , 1986.

22). Discussion with the National Organiser of a large COSATU affiliate. 27th February, 1987.

23) Evaluation of the African American Labour Center Project in the Republic of South Africa. 12 th May, 1986.

24). This construction of the argument has been drawn from a number of discussions with a group of managers who would prefer to remain anonymous.

25). Anglo American Company . Annual Report. 1986.

26). °Managing Political Uncertainity'. Unpublished seminar given at an Institute of Industrial Relations Seminar. Johannesburg. July , 1986.

27). Douwes- Dekker, L, Industrial Relations in South Africa. Unpublished paper delivered at the

International Industrial Relations Association 7 th World Congress. September. 1986. Hamburg . West Germany.

28). See Lewis, D, ' Capital , trade unions and the national liberation struggle'. South African Labour Bulletin. Vol 11 No.4, Feb-March 1986.

29). Siluma, M, Ibid.

30). These points emerged in discussion with three of our colleagues in the Labour Monitoring Group , Stephen Gelb, Jon Lewis and Mark Swilling. Ofcourse we are responsile for the interpretation given in this paper.

31). The idea of a new form of unionism - social movement or political unionism -is developed in a book titled Third World Workers and the new international labour studies. It is edited by Ronaldo Munck and will be published by Zed press in July.

TABLE 1

BLACK WORKER STAYAWAYS 1984 - 1986

NO	DATE	ACTUAL DURATION	AREA	DEMANDS	ORGANIZATION INVOLVED	EMPLOYERS RESPONSE	EFFECTIVENESS
1.	3 September 1984	1 day	Sharpeville	Rent	Civic associations/ shop stewards		60%
2.	17 September 1984	1 day	Soweto	Solidarity on rents Police in townships	R M C		3E - 65%
3.	22 October 1984	1 day	Springs	Student demands	Parent/Student Committee		80%
4.	5 - 6 November 1984	2 day	P W V area	Student demands Repression Cost of living and Rents	Unions Students Community	No work, no pay except SASOL who dismissed all 6,000	80% in unionized factories Approximately 800,000
5.	18 March 1985	1 day	Port Elizabeth	Retrenchments and petrol prices	PEBCO + PEYCO	No work, no pay	90% Africans (PE) 36% Africans (Uitenhage)
6.	21 - 22 March 1985	2 day	Uitenhage	Solidarity for victims of repression	UYCO	No work, no pay	98% Africans 16% Coloureds
7.	14 May 1985	Up to 1 day stay-away on East Rand. Elsewhere short stoppages	East Rand	Solidarity stoppage over death of Raditsela in detention	CWIU and FOSATU	Dependent on form of action	Partial and uneven Up to 100,000 took some form of action
8.	18 July 1985	1 day	Pietermaritzburg	Support of striking SARMCOL workers	MAWU	No work, no pay	100%
9.	10 - 12 September 1985	1 day	Cape Town	Opposition to State of Emergency	Unclear	No work, no pay	37% on 11 September Overall unsuccessful
10.	9 October 1985	1 day	Nationwide	Day of Prayer	Bishop Tutu	?	Unsuccessful
11.	5 March 1986	1 day	P W V area	Release of detained union leader Moses Mayekeso	MAWU	No work, no pay	58%
12.	21 March 1986	1 day	Port Elizabeth/ Uitenhage	Commemoration of Sharpeville and Langa	UDF COSATU	No work, no pay Also authorised leave	98% African) Uitenhage 82% Coloured) 99% African) PE 28% Coloured)

SOURCE: Labour Monitoring Group SALB Volume 10 No. 6; Volume 10 No. 7; Volume 10 No. 8; Volume 11 No. 1; Volume 11 No. 3; Volume 11 No. 5