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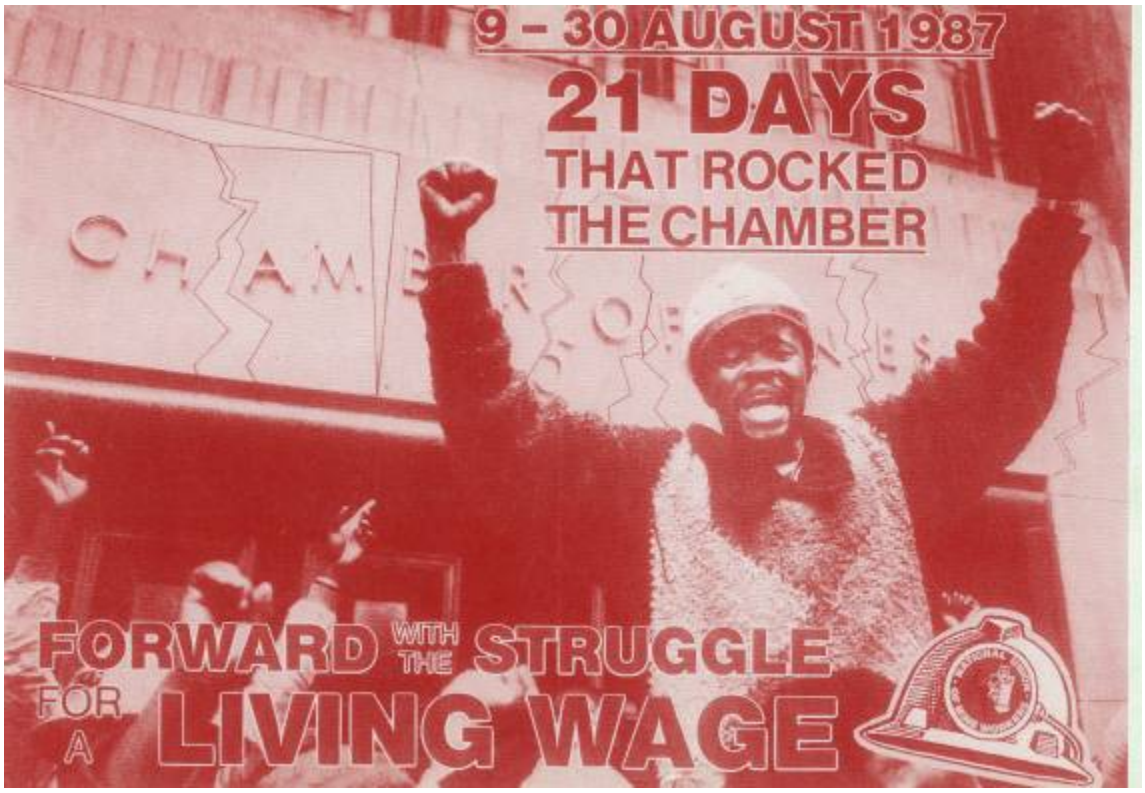
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NUM, the 1987 strike and its Aftermath

A Social History



NUM Poster, from SA Labour Bulletin 13 (1) 1987

1. From cheap labour to a living wage

From the macro heights of social and economic policy, the focus now shifts to the specific historical context in which the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) embarked upon a co-op development programme, the first of what were to become a range of enterprise development and job creation initiatives.

This took place against the backdrop of a highly turbulent period in the history of NUM and in South Africa, and was a response, in the first instance, to the mass dismissal of workers that followed the epic 1987 mineworkers strike for a living wage in the mining industry.

Such dismissal meant being bussed back to the mining industry's 'labour sending areas,' to Bantustans and also to frontline states - whose significant dependence on mining jobs gave the apartheid state implicit if not explicit political leverage.

This took workers – and therefore NUM's job creation programme – into parts of Southern Africa geographically distant from the mining towns and industrial urban landscapes, but no less 'mining communities' for that. The migrant labour system on which South Africa's mining industry is built, the mechanisms through which they secured a supply of cheap labour, and the forms of control and coercion required to sustain this are all defining features of South Africa's political and economic history, and were critical parts of the structure of apartheid and also of its rationale.

This is well-trodden academic terrain (Wolpe 1972, Legassick 1974). In his classic 1972 work *Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid*, Harold Wolpe critiques the concept of a 'dual economy'. While today, the term is used to describe an apparent dichotomy between the formal and informal sectors of the economy, its origins lie instead in the attempt to explain the co-existence of two modes of production within the SA economy: the pre-capitalist mode in the 'reserves', and the capitalist one in the rest of South Africa. Wolpe argued then, as many argue in a different but linked context now, that rather than being separate, these two modes of production were deeply interdependent, with the subsistence sector contributing to the reproduction of labour in the Bantustans in ways that allowed the mining industry to cover only part of these costs:

> When the migrant labourer has access to means of subsistence, outside the capitalist sector, as he does in South Africa, then the relationship between wages and the cost of the production and reproduction of labour-power is changed. That is to say, capital is able to pay the worker *below* the cost of his reproduction. In the first place, since in determining the level of wages necessary for the subsistence of the migrant worker and his family, account is taken of the fact that the family is supported, to some extent, from the product of agricultural production in the Reserves, it becomes possible to fix wages at the level of subsistence of the individual worker. (Wolpe 1972: 434)

Over time, however, pressure on land in the reserves placed pressure on the contribution to reproduction that subsistence agriculture could make. Wolpe anticipates that this would create increased conflict, not only over wages but over the entire structure of the society, and that such conflict would be met by political measures that would in turn generate a political reaction. (Wolpe 1972: 444)

The 1987 mineworkers strike for a living wage represented a critical moment in just such a cycle in South Africa. By then, the crisis of rural reproduction was acute. Arguably, a tipping point had been reached in Bantustans such as the Transkei, so that not only was the rural economy unable to play its designated role in underpinning cheap wages, but in fact, the reproduction of rural households had instead become dependent on cash transfers from the mines and the urban economy. These pressures on the rural economy and its declining capacity also correlate with the trend in the industry away from short-term contracts and towards career mining over this period.

The pressures on the logic of migrant labour as a means to secure cheap labour were no doubt one part of the context that made NUM's remarkable growth possible, and that made the call for 'a living wage' resonate so deeply. A mere five years after NUM was formally launched in 1982, it had become South Africa's largest trade union, able to pull off the largest strike in South African history.

This context also meant that when the buses brought 40,000 men home to rural areas in 1987, and continued to bring a further 300,000 retrenched workers home in the years to come, the effects on rural local economies were devastating.

Against this wider background, this Chapter provides a social history that describes the immediate context in which NUM's co-op programme began, and the expectations and meanings attached to this. This is key to understanding the phases that follow also, because of how it illustrates the highly contested ways in which development intervention impacts at local levels, the ways in which power and politics imbue such processes in ways that have to be constantly negotiated, and the role, in this particular context, of an organization such as NUM in mediating the outcomes of such power struggles – even as NUM itself went through analogous power struggles and processes internally.

The starting point in NUM and with the 1987 mineworkers strike also locates the start of the story within the labour market, and the struggles then underway within it. Many of the key protagonists in these struggles on the mines were amongst the 40,000 sent home on the buses. They found themselves suddenly dislocated and displaced, rudely expelled from the heart of South Africa's economy to its margins.

The transition from a trade union battleground to a very different terrain of struggle was a significant rupture. The considerable collective power that arose from the logic of collective action on the mines and in the labour market simply did not translate into power at all for ex-miners dispersed on the outskirts of the market economy, nor did the strategies used on the mines have any traction in facing down the competitive market pressures soon to confront them in the co-ops and other forms of enterprise.

So, while there was a political continuity of purpose, this could not be translated into a continuity of practice. Yet despite such discontinuity, the early patterns of action saw the ex-miners attempting to create just such continuities in both their organisational structures and strategies.

In the co-op period, much of the learning is about this transition, and the 'discovery' of the logic of the different kinds of markets that they now faced in their capacity as entrepreneurs, by contrast with the logic of the labour market they had confronted as workers. This transition took time. It took even longer to start to understand what scope existed to challenge and start to transform these other kinds of markets – and the ways in which different forms of collective power could be brought back into play in new ways – not only for workers, but for NUM and MDA as organisations also.

2. The 1987 strike

> The massive 1987 mineworkers strike, the biggest and costliest wage dispute in the history of South Africa no doubt marks one of the highpoints in the development of militant progressive worker struggles here. Not only does the strike stand out for the large amount of workers mobilised to fight for a "living wage" and decent working conditions, 340,000 at its height, but because of the strategic economic and political importance of the mining industry in South Africa. (Markham and Mothibeli 1987: 58)

The 1987 mineworkers strike changed the mining industry forever. For NUM, it was 'the twenty-one days that rocked the Chamber' (i.e. the Chamber of Mines). Twenty-one days was far longer than the industry or NUM had anticipated the strike

would last – and while it inflicted significant damage on the industry, it nearly destroyed NUM.

It was a brutal and intensely violent strike, in an industry characterized by the institutionalised violence of the migrant labour system, manifested both by high and recurrent outbreaks of violence within the hostels, and the routine use of force to maintain control, with each mining company operating its own private security force.

In one of many interchanges between NUM and the industry over the causalities and responsibility for the recurrent pattern of violence on the mines, NUM placed an advertisement in the Weekly Mail in early 1987 to present its view:

> Let it be known once and for all that the source of conflict is rooted in the institutions of oppression and exploitation that exist in the mining industry. The hostel system, migrant labour and *induna* system were pioneered at the turn of the century by mineworkers' lives. It is from this brutal and draconian system that the AAC (Anglo American Corporation) has benefited. Over time these structures have been refined but kept intact. AAC has identified and acknowledges some of the issues which have caused the tensions. But what has it done? AAC wants industrial relations to be sound and orderly yet it is not prepared to remove the archaic structures which are the source of the conflict. It wants to publicly articulate its liberal views and distance itself from the violence and deaths, when the very cause of the problems emanates from the institutions it has created... (*Weekly Mail* 10 January 1987, quoted in Allen 2003: 236)

The hostel system is a deeply entrenched institution in South Africa's mining industry. A mine hostel is linked directly to a mine shaft, so that workers live adjacent to their place of work, in large, single-sex, access-controlled barracks. In the gold mines, the number of residents in a single hostel ranged from 3,000 to 5,000, with 10 – 18 men per room. (Allen 2003: 6) Hostels were under the authority of *'indunas'* – appointed by management, but often through referrals from tribal authorities in workers' home areas, where chiefs historically also played a role in mine recruitment processes (Callinicos 1980: 35). This created a link between traditional authority in rural areas and the mines, compounded by the ethnic segregation of hostels, or of areas within hostels. This context had a number of implications for trade union organisation:

> In industry at large, the interface between workers and employers was at the point of production but in mining it also occurred in the hostels for the hostel managers regulated and controlled the after-work life of the mineworkers and thus extended the area of potential conflict between workers and management. (Allen 2003: 210)

For as long as no trade union had managed to gain entry to the hostels, this was 'a world apart'. But once NUM had recruited members within the hostels, the opportunity to organize hostels on a room by room basis during off-duty hours meant the hostels became a crucial locus of trade union organisation on the mines. NUM's mobilizing slogan for 1986 was for mineworkers to 'take control of the hostels'. As Allen notes, this was a threat to management but, in particular, it spread alarm amongst the *indunas* who were based in the hostels but whose power was derived from management and their link to traditional authority – and was being eroded. (Allen 2003: 210). This process escalated when NUM introduced a system of electing shaft stewards at mine level. The role of shaft stewards was to take up grievances with management, and to represent workers in contexts in which allegations were made against them. The role of such shaft stewards is explained by Jack Mpapea, then chief shaft steward at Vaal Reefs No. 4 – and later a key protagonist in the NUM Co-ops:

> With the establishment of NUM, of the union, to represent the workers, in the mine, there's a great difference, because now, if ever there's a problem...you are allowed to sit down and given a chance for a hearing. (Mpapea, quoted in Moodie 1994: 255)

The introduction of shaft stewards at mine and hostel level had a huge impact on traditional authority relations in the hostels:

> Once management agreed to the shaft system, the induna system rapidly became redundant (at least in its representative functions), and a new regime ruled the compounds, a NUM regime. (Moodie 1994: 255)

The displacement of the power of the indunas and the challenge to management's unilateral authority on the mines was often accompanied by violent conflicts. In the build-up to the 1987 strike, neither side had any illusions that violence would not be used, and both sides prepared themselves for what was, in practice, more of an industrial war than a strike. Reuters correspondent Christopher Wilson described the scene in the days before the strike began:

> South Africa's strike-bound Western Transvaal gold mines this week looked more like military installations than the major profit centres that form the backbone of the economy. Most....were sealed off by heavily armed mine security men backed by plainclothes police. Armoured vehicles crammed with steel helmeted soldiers and police patrolled the main roads of the goldfields. (Quoted in Allen 2003: 317)

Each mining house had its own security force. The best armed and most notorious of these was in Goldfields. A confidential report leaked to NUM by a former Goldfields employee revealed that Goldfields had an armoury of 6,000 shotguns, anti-riot vehicles and dog units, ran a mine-security training camp where security personnel from other mines were trained, and had even patented its own rubber bullet (Philip 1989: 214).

For mineworkers, the distinction between mine security and state security was blurred – both were 'the boers'. According to a worker dismissed from Anglo's Western Deep Levels mine during the strike:

> The boers (mine security) have guns, pistols, sjamboks, teargas, Hippos (personnel carriers) and dogs. They have all the dangerous weapons which they may turn on us at any time. (Quoted in Philip 1989: 215)

A key feature of the strike was the way in which control of the hostels was seized. As workers barricaded themselves inside – a process facilitated by the single-access entry points - management and the security forces laid siege from outside – using tried and trusted mediaeval tactics such as cutting off food supplies and power for cooking and arresting workers who came to seek medical attention (Allen 2003: 335). In a well documented case at Western Deep Levels Mine, miners claimed to have been forced underground at gunpoint.

This incident is described by a dismissed worker who was later a member of NUM's Flagstaff co-op, who explained that workers had locked themselves into the hostel when six green Hippos from Western Deep Levels security and six white Hippos from another mine arrived at the gate:

> ...those boers rammed the gate with the Hippos, broke it open, and rode into the hostel. They said over the loudspeakers, 'Now we are taking control, no-one is going to control again, you are too late with your controlling.' They told us to go to our rooms, and then they just started to attack us with their dangerous weapons, shooting at us, without even giving us five minutes, using teargas, rubber bullets and pistols with proper bullets. When we were in our rooms, they turned off the water, and they stopped food from coming in.
>
> At nine o'clock that night, they told us to come out, we are going to work now. They shot teargas into the rooms, and chased us out with batons, and forced us to stand in line. They then forced us into the lifts at gunpoint, and we were faced with no choice but to go underground, all the shifts at once, and also the surface workers, forced down underground at gunpoint. (Quoted in Philip 1989: 215)

Some of the workers forced underground were barefoot, and few were in work gear. Once underground, separated onto two separate levels, workers began a sit-in protest. On level 66, workers made weapons out of metal objects, vandalised mine property, and threatened the white miners who had been deployed there to supervise the work, and who ran away and hid underground. On Level 100, the sit-in strike was peaceful. When cages did finally come to collect workers at the end of the shift, they were met on the surface by security officials, dismissed, and escorted to buses to take them home. (Allen 2003: 365-6)

As the strike progressed, mass dismissals such as these escalated, particularly on those mines where conflict was most intense. By week three, 54,000 workers had been dismissed. In the end, it was when news reached NUM General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa that the Anglo American Corporation had taken a decision to dismiss its entire workforce that the strike was brought to an end, and NUM's leadership agreed to accept the most recent offer from the Chamber - despite a strike ballot by workers two days earlier that had rejected these same terms. (Allen 2003: 385)

The gains won were marginal: a 10% increase on the annual leave allowance, and an increase in the death benefit from two to three times workers' annual salary. There was no wage increase. The minimum wage on the gold mines at the time was R230 a month, and R335 on the coal mines, with 85% of black mineworkers earning wages below the poverty datum line. (Markham and Mothibeli 1987: 59-60).

The fate of workers dismissed during the strike became a key issue. Ramaphosa had believed that the agreement that clinched the end of the strike included the unconditional reinstatement of all these workers. The Chamber denied it. The lack of a common understanding on this critical point only became evident when the strike had been officially called off – providing a salutary tale about the risks of reaching 'gentlemen's agreements' when you are not dealing with gentlemen.

Despite NUM's attempts to fight this issue, including extensive litigation, reinstatement was selective. About 40,000 workers were not reinstated, and were blacklisted from future employment on the mines. These workers included NUM President James Motlatsi, almost the entire National Executive Committee, many

Regional Committee members, education officers, and shaft stewards. In fact, organisationally, NUM was decimated.

NUM leaders faced a difficult balancing act in the aftermath of the strike. Despite the limited gains and the significant losses, it was crucial to cast the strike as a victory, which – in his inimical style - Ramaphosa managed to do:

> Defeating the bosses' aim of destroying the NUM is clearly a resounding victory. (Ramaphosa quoted in Allen 2003: 389)

Despite the apparently back-footed nature of this victory, Ramaphosa was not wrong. Powerful players in the industry were indeed intent on destroying NUM; but the cost of doing so was, in the end, more than even the Chamber was willing to pay – and they stepped back from the brink. The logical corollary to this was that the mining industry now had no alternative but to deal with NUM as a legitimate presence in the industry. This was a fundamental change, acknowledged by the President of the Chamber of Mines, Naas Steenkamp, at the end of the strike. He said that the mines had learnt 'about the effectiveness of the NUM's muscle, organisational capacity and skill,' and that the strike was 'the beginning of a new learning phase in the relationship between the union and the Chamber' (Quoted in Allen 2003: 389). It certainly was. The strike changed the nature of industrial relations in the mining industry, and significantly empowered NUM to make gains in the years to come – not least because the mines had taken heavy losses in the strike also, and no mine management wanted to repeat the experience if it could be avoided – and there has been no strike on that scale in the industry since.

Meanwhile, NUM faced some rather more immediate challenges. It had to re-constitute its battered structures at mine level and respond to the crisis of those 40,000 core members and activists now outside both the union and the industry. This was a double-edged issue. On the one hand, NUM really did need the skills and capacities and commitment of this cadre of now-dismissed union activists, who had actually built the union, and whose organising and conflict management skills were sorely missed at mine level in the organisational mayhem that followed the strike.

But at the same time, this was a powerful lobby of union leaders and activists, with formidable organising skills from NUM's most militant and populist phase, now

unexpectedly unemployed and on the outside of the union. If things went wrong, their potential to do damage to NUM was significant. These stalwarts of NUM were now a potential threat.

So, there was both a genuine need to retain the skills of many of these activists, at the same time as the need to contain their potential power to cause damage to the union. According to the NUM constitution, the President of the union had to be a working miner; but NUM needed its dismissed President, James Motlatsi, to remain in post over this crucial period, and so he did until the constitution could be changed at the 1989 Congress. Some former NEC members were absorbed as staff; and some NEC members were given *ad hoc* responsibilities for organising dismissed workers in the key labour-sending areas – mainly Lesotho and the Eastern Cape.

In the process, they needed living allowances, accommodation, and transport. In providing these, NUM was responding to the initial urgent contingencies of reaching out to dismissed workers across Southern Africa, of developing an organizational strategy for them, and of ensuring that the message was conveyed that NUM had not 'forgotten' them, that NUM was fighting their case, and that, in the first instance, their return to the industry was still envisaged.

In the chaos of the aftermath of the strike, the distinction between imperatives and choices was not entirely explicit; decisions were made in the heat of the moment that set precedents, created expectations and divisions that resonated well beyond this period. There was little scripted about it, however: it was new terrain for all concerned, and the stakes were very high.

So, when the hotel bookings and hired cars were first arranged, these were largely pragmatic decisions informed by organizational imperatives. The difficult politics of how and at what stage to remove such facilities from now-unemployed former worker-leaders of NUM was not anticipated. And because in the end, it was a relatively small cadre of dismissed leaders who could be permanently employed or deployed by NUM, access to these forms of organizational resources became highly contested.

Small wonder then, that power struggles and forms of patronage relations were intense, as a much-weakened NUM tried to conceal the extent of its injuries not only from the apartheid state and mining industry employers, but from its own members as well. The arrests and dismissals had left a gaping power vacuum in NUM's structures and leadership at many mines, which was not something the union could afford. NUM faced the task of urgently re-constituting its battered and tattered structures at local level; at the same time as finding ways to support the 40,000 dismissed workers. This was the constituency – and the set of imperatives - that was passed on to NUM's job creation programme.

3. The Eastern Cape Story

3.1 The transition from NUM

This section will start by introducing two of the key protagonists in the Eastern Cape process, because of the ways in which their own stories illustrate the social and political context in which NUM was operating. Their stories also serve to contextualise the kinds of bitter struggles that followed in the development process and illustrate the kinds of issues that arose in the difficult early stages of organizing mineworkers into NUM. It encompassed a process that was tough, often dangerous, and with a volatile mix of tribalism and anti-tribalism, tradition and a challenge to tradition, violence and anti-violence, the building of democracy and the building of fiefdoms. All these elements were happening simultaneously. The sharp struggles over the trajectory of union development, that were acute during the 1987 strike and its aftermath. The outcome – a large trade union in which democratic practices are (largely) institutionalised, and which usually acts more as a constraint on violence and anarchy in the mines than as an instigator of these, was never a pre-determined outcome – and depends still on the role and calibre of leadership at every level.

In the Eastern Cape, the former Regional Chair of Randfontein Region, Elliot Nomazele Bhala, took the reins of leadership. Bhala was – and is – notorious. It would be a mistake to imagine that his small wiry stature, his use of a 'deep' Xhosa unintelligible at times even to other Xhosa speakers, or his refusal to speak any English reflect in any way on his ability to wield power, to marshal resources, or to hold people in a grip of allegiance.

In early 1988, Bhala announced over the radio that ex-miners in all 28 districts in the Transkei should elect District Committees, in preparation for a meeting to be held in Butterworth, for which he had secured the permission of the magistrate, in order to establish a Regional Committee of the Transkei Ex-Mineworkers Co-op (TEMCOP). At this meeting, a Planning Committee was elected, with 3 representatives from Eastern and Western Transkei, with Bhala as Chair. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Sipho Nqwelo, a former shaft steward at Vaal Reefs Number 2 Shaft, and Chair of the Strike Committee, was elected as Secretary of the District Committee in Willowvale District, and at the Butterworth meeting he was elected onto the Planning Committee.

Nqwelo was a key figure in NUM's co-op programme, and came to lead the opposition to Elliot Bhala in the Eastern Cape. He became Chair of Qwe Qwe Co-op outside Umtata, and was later in charge of NUM's 'Mobile Job Creation Unit', a 20-ton truck that delivered training to mines during retrenchment processes. Later still, he became a trainer in MDA, and is a 'key informant' across the different stages of the programme.

Nqwelo was born in Willowvale, in Pondoland, in the Transkei bantustan, now part of the Eastern Cape. He was the first-born of six children. His father was a miner, who worked on Buffelsfontein Mine. When Nqwelo was in Std 6, he had to leave school, because his girlfriend became pregnant.

> You must remember, for us the Xhosas, immediately you haven't gone to circumcision school, if your girlfriend fell pregnant, you are not accepted – you are afraid even to go outside – you must stay at home. So I had to run away, so I went to stay with my cousin in Vereeniging, in the hostel where he was staying. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

This was in 1978. There were constant police raids in the hostel, and Nqwelo had no pass to be in an urban area, as required by the 'influx control' laws that governed the movement of black people at the time. Finally, he decided there was no alternative but to go to the mines. But to do so, he had to return to his rural home area, in order to be recruited and get a pass through Teba, the mine labour recruiting agency owned by the Chamber of Mines.

> I knew that I would be employed because there was a friend of my father who was giving passes in Butterworth, and he had connections with this Teba official so they assured me that they had employment… and I was employed and then sent to Vaal Reefs Mine, and I started working there on 11 November 1978 until 1987. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Nqwelo worked on Number 2 Shaft; staying in the hostel in a room with 16 men. His first job was to load rock into the locomotive underground. Then he became a '*picanin*' to a white miner.

> There was this thing of a *picanin* in the mine, you carry this bag –the *skaf tin* for this person (the white miner), his food and water, iced water, and you go with him, carrying this thing… You have to take his overall out and wash it after knocking off… but it was just a better job than the one of loading (rock), because you were just moving with this guy, and it was hot….
>
> I was then transferred to the engineering department where I worked, assisting there, because even if you went on a course of boiler maker, you couldn't do it during that time, it was reserved for whites, so you would still be an assistant there, so I worked at the boilermaker department. At least it was becoming better, that was the situation. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Nqwelo joined an English class after hours at the mine, and that is where he was recruited to NUM. Nqwelo became a union organizer in Number 2 Shaft – a role that went with significant risks. This was a time when ethnically-based strategies of divide and rule permeated mine life, and faction fights were common. According to Nqwelo, the key to faction fights was the power of rumour. Following a build-up of such rumours between Pondo and Sotho workers at Number 2 Shaft in 1986, a fight broke out one night. Nqwelo and another union leader tried to intervene:

> We decided to go inside. I said, no, we want to know, why are they fighting, because they didn't tell us. We are their leaders, so if they decide to kill us, they must kill us. So we went through this mob, we passed the Basothos, they didn't do anything; we went straight towards the end of the hostel, where the Pondos were.
>
> They were divided; the Xhosas were sitting on another block, all of them, well armed, they said, we don't want to be involved, we don't know this fight between the Basothos and Pondos. Then we went to the Pondos, already eight people were dead, a lot were injured. …So I decided to go to the resting station, and I called the ambulances on my own. I was just making my way up and down going towards West Vaal Hospital with these ambulances, going to help those who were still injured, we didn't care about those who were already dead, we were just jumping over them. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Despite attempts by management to disarm workers the next day, the fighting continued, until finally, according to Nqwelo, the Pondo workers were defeated and opted to leave the mine. Nqwelo was from Pondoland himself. He offered to leave the mine, but the remaining workers from other ethnic groups persuaded him to stay. Nqwelo uses this to explain how the union started to build a solidarity that transcended tribal divisions – despite their real impact on mine life.

Bhala was regional chair of NUM's Randfontein Region, and was from Randfontein Estate Gold Mine. According to Nqwelo, Bhala was the child of a daughter of Chief Nonkonyane, from the Flagstaff District in the Eastern Cape. The daughter was unmarried, and the child was taken into the Nonkonyane household. But unlike the rest of the family, who were sent to school, Bhala remained at the homestead herding cattle.

> Traditionally those people are chiefs, Nonkonyane's, so there was a time that he wanted to be something in this clan, of which they know that he is not their clan. So I used to say when he started this thing of going to Lusaka and doing those things, I used to say to my colleagues, look, if this guy went to school, if this guy was educated, we would be having another Jonas Savimbi here in South Africa; because he is cruel and very clever. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

James Motlatsi tells the story of a mass meeting chaired by Bhala at Randfontein Estates. There were about six miners seated on the platform behind him. He assumed they were local branch or shaft level leaders; gave his speech, and was leaving when a miner pulled him aside and said: 'Comrade Motlatsi, why did you ignore the *impimpis* on the platform? Why did you not congratulate us on catching them? They are going to die now.'

Motlatsi made his way back to the platform; he took back the stage, berating the leadership and the crowd; explaining that such an action would be completely unacceptable to the union, and personally escorted the six hapless alleged *impimpis* to safety. (Story related to the author by Motlatsi and others during the early co-op years).

Whether this was indeed the intention or not, this story illustrates some of the hazards of building a trade union in SA's mining industry, and the kinds of processes involved in establishing the 'rules of the game' in that context. It also illustrates the

volatility of the situation at the time, and the extent to which events at regional level could unfold without national knowledge or sanction.

Nqwelo uses the 1984 experience of a national strike that was called off at the last minute to provide another illustration of how easily this could happen. As he describes it, shaft stewards from the mine had gone to Johannesburg as part of NUM's national negotiating team, and at the last minute, they reached an agreement to call off the strike. They returned to the mine on a Sunday evening, just before the strike was supposed to start. Nqwelo was Chair of the strike committee and had stayed behind; Oliver Sokhanyile (Soks) gave the report-back to workers:

> It was already at night past 6 to 7 and you must remember people were drunk already, knowing that they are not going to work, they are going on strike; there was that spirit; so people filled this arena. When we arrived there they started now addressing the crowd: 'Okay, these are the issues that have been agreed upon - but there was no agreement on the wage increase.' So even some of the shop stewards started now mixing around the workers to say: 'No, these people have been bought'; and there was chaos, they wanted to kill Soks, even the songs now changed, they were singing about Soks....the song said: 'Soks is selling us to the Boers, let's kill him ...'
>
> So, wearing the strike committee t-shirt, I jumped over the platform to cool the crowd, calling '*Amandla! Amandla*!' and they calmed down. I said 'look guys' - I didn't even want to consult Soks and others because I could see this situation is getting out of control - I said, 'Look, let's agree we are not going down (the mine), even the day shift, tomorrow, we are not going to work. Let's meet tomorrow and have a meeting so that we can all understand this agreement.' And they were happy, they started now going out of this arena singing and marching all over the hostel. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

So, despite the agreement reached by NUM with the Chamber of Mines at a national level, the exigencies of the moment meant NUM at Vaal Reefs went on strike anyway. 'Exigencies of the moment' were to dictate a similar pattern in the co-ops, despite NUM's significant levels of influence on the process – and would require similar levels of local leadership to determine the outcomes.

3.2 Struggles over Co-op Formation in the Eastern Cape

> Then the Branch Committees were told to come with their belongings and stay in Umtata so that it is easier to communicate because we are about to start these big things that we were dreaming about. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

NUM had sufficient resources left over from strike solidarity funds to set up two co-ops each in Lesotho and the Eastern Cape. The first two co-ops were established at Qwe Qwe village just outside Umtata, and on a site just outside the very small town of Flagstaff, in Pondoland. When the feasibility studies for Flagstaff and Qwe Qwe showed that these two co-ops could each support only twenty members this seemed appallingly inconsequential, against the back-drop of the 40,000 jobs lost.

These feasibility studies had been completed just in time for a trip to the Transkei by Cyril Ramaphosa to address ex-miners in 1988. It was the first time a trade union leader had formally addressed a meeting in the territory, which had only recently seen General Bantu Holomisa overthrow Stella Sigcau in a coup in 1987. The NUM delegation was lead by Cyril Ramaphosa, and I was part of it. A mass meeting of ex-miners was held in an Umtata hall, to deal with post-strike issues, with the detail of the co-ops to be established left to a follow-up meeting the next day. About seven cars with Transkei plainclothes policemen followed the NUM delegation wherever it went. At the end of the day, an ox was slaughtered in Ramaphosa's honour, at an event held in a village on the outskirts of Umtata. He invited the policemen to join the feast, which – rather sheepishly – they did.

In this context, the first opportunity I had to brief Ramaphosa about the outcomes of the feasibility studies was over breakfast in the Transkei Hotel, while representatives from each of the twenty eight districts in Transkei were already waiting in the hall next door.

Ramaphosa was aghast. With 40,000 ex-miners expecting jobs in co-ops, the first co-ops would take twenty people each? By the end of breakfast, based on some calculations on the back of his cigarette box, and against the backdrop of the sounds of toyi-toying in the hall next door, the *real politik* of the situation dictated that there would be sixty members in each co-op, drawn evenly from all twenty-eight districts in the Eastern Cape, with the balance drawn from the Regional Committee, and they would have to share the jobs, on a rotational shift basis.

Against a benchmark of 40,000, this didn't help much, and caused enormous harm to the co-ops, but it was done. The imperatives that informed this decision seemed legitimate and compelling at the time: and given the tightrope being walked by NUM

in the Transkei, who's to say the judgement was wrong? In fact, it was not wrong for NUM: it was yet another strategic response that contained and averted a level of potential crisis that could have changed the course of NUM's history.

However, it certainly was wrong for the co-ops as business entities, and the dramatic initial oversupply of labour in these co-ops compounded many of the other problems that later arose. Earnings that would have been low anyway were now much lower: the target wages for the co-op in the initial feasibility study for twenty people had been set just above the minimum wage levels in the industry at R350 a month. Management problems that were complex anyway were three times as complex.

The next key battle was over the control of co-op finances. Bhala opposed the co-ops controlling their own funds, and mobilized ex-miners around the demand that the profits of the co-ops be distributed to all workers in the twenty-eight District Committees.

> He wanted monies to come to the region, and then you will agree with him that this budget must be sent to the co-op – but not direct to the co-op, he was against that, because now you are killing his influence because for him having control over money is everything; then we kneel in front of him. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

At the 1989 NUM Congress, a large delegation of ex-miners lead by Bhala was present, demanding representation and voting rights at the Congress. A huge struggle ensued, but the ex-miners could not muster the voting support required to change the constitution, in which membership rights are terminated six months after a member exits from the industry. In the two years since the strike, National Executive Committee and Regional Committee members had been elected in place of those dismissed, and had little interest in seeing their re-instatement. Bhala's power in NUM was on the wane: but it was not over yet.

Soon thereafter, I was informed by an exasperated Cyril Ramaphosa that James Motlatsi was on a plane to Lusaka – at the ANC's request - to fetch Bhala and his secretary in the region, Sonwabo Msezeli. Bhala and Msezeli had found their way to Lusaka, and in a meeting with the exiled ANC, had informed them that NUM was a Sotho-dominated organisation, and a threat to the ANC (the sub-text being that the ANC was a 'Xhosa organisation'); and that inter alia 'James Motlatsi and Kate Philip should be destroyed.'

The ANC heard them out, and then contacted Ramaphosa to ask what they should do with NUM's renegade members. It was agreed Motlatsi would come to Lusaka to fetch them. A few days later, Bhala and Msezeli were to be found looking rather sheepish and dishevelled in the office of Ramaphosa's secretary, waiting for taxi money to go home to the Transkei.

They returned to Umtata, but tensions within the Eastern Cape structures ran high, and Bhala started to face a challenge from below. When other committee members removed a union bakkie from him on the basis that he was failing to keep to agreed procedures for its use, Bhala promptly laid charges of theft against them at the local police station – and accused them of being ANC members also, for good measure. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Bhala's next move was to mobilize the District Committees to demand payment from NUM for the work they had done in organising ex-miners after the strike, acting as the communication channels for information about the progress of the legal cases of the dismissed workers. The District Committees had, in fact, done a significant amount of liaison between NUM and the dismissed workers, and not surprisingly, this demand united the region. A delegation representing all the districts – and which included Nqwelo - arrived unannounced at NUM Head Office to demand payment for the District Committees, which NUM - most ill-advisedly - agreed to make.

An amount of R52, 000 was transferred to the Transkei account, as a one-off 'honorarium' for distribution to members of the 28 District Committees in the Transkei. While there may have been a case for some form of reimbursement for District Committee members, the method by which it was negotiated significantly empowered Bhala and validated these tactics. The unannounced arrival of combi-loads of ex-miners demanding money became a common occurrence. But ironically, this victory for Bhala had unintended consequences that were to prove his downfall in the end; because although the money was paid into the Transkei regional account, it never reached the ex-miners. They became increasingly suspicious, as Bhala made promises, slaughtered oxen – but never paid. He was accused of 'chowing' the money – as workers put it. He then faced not only an enquiry by NUM's NEC, but the wrath of ex-miners also – which no doubt catalysed his next move.

Bhala arrived at NUM Head Office with a combi-load of armed men, and took Cyril Ramaphosa and James Motlatsi hostage, demanding more money. Ramaphosa managed to alert Sipho Nqwelo.

> We were phoned in the Eastern Cape that Bhala is here (in Johannesburg) and that they were in trouble. We said to Cyril, no, don't refuse him……you know, there is danger in life….What you do, tell him that you are busy preparing the cheques, and they are going to get them tomorrow. And then we organised ourselves, we were twelve. We went and took the bakkie in the evening at about 6 o'clock. We were well armed, with guns, and swords. We came here to Johannesburg, and we were well organised, even including people from the eastern side, from Pondoland. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

Even in times of crisis, when the urgent task was to rescue the General Secretary and President of NUM, Nqwelo recognised the strategic importance of ensuring that the delegation sent to deal with Bhala was ethnically even-handed – hence the emphasis on including people from Pondoland.

> So we arrived in the morning, I think it was 5 o'clock…… So we went straight to the third floor, and we find these people seated there, so we started *klapping* them, taking their IDs and they didn't understand what is happening and they were nervous because they know nothing – those people, they were just taken by Bhala using them as back-up…….
>
> So we took their IDs and everything and then we went up to where the national leadership was. We found Bhala there, I think he was with Ramaphosa. The national leadership didn't sleep. So we started beating him there in front of Cyril – I remember Motlatsi was the one now who was appealing to us not to kill Bhala.
>
> We went to search those kombis, taking whatever, confiscating whatever, there were some weapons there…. Bhala was at the waiting room with his people…But we made a blunder and now we started going to this bottle store, buying some beers, and Bhala escaped. Somebody saw him – running to the lift, and we have to wait for another lift now to get Bhala. When we reached downstairs, Bhala was already gone, so he ran away. He never came back – that was the last. (Interview with Nqwelo: 2003)

It may have been the last of Bhala in the NUM Co-ops but it was far from being the last of Bhala in the Eastern Cape – or, as it happens, in the mining industry. Some time later, he was involved in taxi wars in Flagstaff, and – as the story goes - the youth in Flagstaff attacked him and cut off his leg. When he was taken to the Holy Cross Hospital near Flagstaff, his reputation was such that the nurses were too afraid to treat him: he had to be taken to Umtata Hospital. Whatever the truth of the

matter – and the anecdotes vary on the detail – part of one of his legs has been amputated. He also made it onto the ANC list in the Eastern Cape for the first parliamentary elections, but too low down to make it as a Member of Parliament; and was more recently to be found – circa 2003 - arm-twisting Teba and the Chamber of Mines to provide compensation for ex-miners in a new organisation.

With Bhala removed, the focus in the Transkei Co-ops could finally shift to co-op issues. Before moving to these, however, it is necessary to bring the Lesotho story to the same point.

4. The Lesotho Story

4.1.1 The anti-politics machine

Lesotho has its own complex political history, with two main parties competing for power. In 1970, the opposition Basotho Congress Party won the election on a progressive and anti-monarchist ticket; the ruling Basotho National Party annulled the election and declared a state of emergency. The BNP ruled for the next 16 years, banning the opposition and forcing its leaders into exile or into the mountains, from where they fought a low-key guerrilla war. (Gay and Hill 2000: 7)

This did not stop massive international aid flowing into Lesotho (Gay and Hill 2000: 8). A case study of a World-Bank-funded development project in Lesotho in the period 1975-1984 is provided in James Ferguson's classic ethnographic study, 'The Anti-Politics Machine.' Ferguson describes the aid-funded development apparatus in Lesotho in the period 1975 – 1984 as 'an anti-politics machine, depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding state power.' (Ferguson 1990: xv).

For Ferguson, this depoliticisation of development is illustrated by the way in which development texts, such as the World Bank's country strategy paper, studiously avoid mention of the causal linkages between Lesotho's 'underdevelopment' and the colonial wars that saw it dispossessed of significant arable land; or the link between its economic options and the political choices it made about its relationship with apartheid South Africa – and with the ANC.

Ferguson uses a close textual analysis to demonstrate how Lesotho is consistently projected as a subsistence and 'backward' rural economy only now waking up to and integrating into the market system. This is entirely ahistorical. Lesotho was known as the granary of the early goldfields, and was actively engaged in South Africa's own developing agricultural markets from the late 19th century. This changed when the borders were moved in 1912, pushing Lesotho further up the mountains and transferring vast swathes of productive agricultural land from Basotho hands into SA's Orange Free State.

Lesotho was forced out of agricultural markets, rather than being a reluctant late entrant into them; and rather than becoming a subsistence agricultural economy, Lesotho instead became increasingly integrated into a different market – the labour market. The 1986 census found that nearly half the working male population of Lesotho worked on South Africa's mines; in the 1980's, remittances accounted for about half of its gross national product (GNP) and 100% of its gross domestic product (GDP). (Crush et al 1999: 1)

Ferguson argues that in the highly political context of the 1970's and 1980's, and under a form of authoritarian rule backed by South Africa, the use of international aid money to run development projects played an insidious role, treating development problems as technocratic challenges, and the extension of the role of the state through the delivery of government services at village-level as a bureaucratic exercise devoid of political meaning.

In his conclusion, Ferguson makes a plea for a different kind of development – a development from below. He says:

> ....the 'development' problematic tends to exclude from the field of view all forces for change that are not based on the paternal guiding hand of the state; it can hardly imagine change coming in any other way. But, from outside that problematic, it seems clear that the most important transformations, the transformations that really matter, are not simply "introduced" by benevolent technocrats, but fought for and made through a complex process that involves not only states and their agents, but all those with something at stake, all the diverse categories of people who craft their everyday tactics of coping with, adapting to, and in their various ways, resisting the established social order....(Ferguson 1990: 281)

He notes that massive change is coming in the region, and points, among others, to 'mineworkers joining the large and rapidly growing National Union of Mineworkers' as potential agents of such change.

The events covered in this thesis are in many ways a reply to Ferguson's plea, with Basotho ex-miners as agents of development and agents of change, engaged in just such struggles as he describes, and in a context in which the links between the politics of Lesotho and of South Africa could not be more explicit – and travel in both directions. In fact, in this story, politics is the starting point. In the period in which Ferguson's World Bank project was doing its depoliticising damndest, many BCP members had fled Lesotho – and many had fled to the mines in South Africa. Puseletso Salae was one such exile.

> The reason why we actually supported NUM, we saw it as another vehicle that will assist us to fight the BNP in Lesotho. It is true that they were talking about, you know, issues of dismissals at work, and injuries, but when we were sitting somewhere in the corridors, we could see that no, this is exactly the organization that we wanted to take us back to Lesotho, because many of us – including myself – could not go back to Lesotho. You remember, when I was deported the first time in 1986 (from South Africa to Lesotho), it was my first time to go to Lesotho after ten years. I left Lesotho as a young boy to the mines to come here, but I could not go back because my family were BCP members. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

During these years, however, the conservative and monarchist BNP had undergone a political *volte face*:

> The Basotho National Party, while it was ruling Lesotho, it was supported by South Africans, but early in 1979 when Lebua Jonathon went to Red China and the Eastern Bloc and so forth – when he came back after meeting the ANC – strongly now he came up and declared himself, that I don't want to support these wild boers anymore. I still remember that paper called The Rand Daily Mail, I read it – where he was saying 'I have changed my mind, I am no more supporting the South African government, the Cubans and the Russians are here to stay in my country permanently in order to make South Africa behave.' The Soviet Embassy was there in Lesotho. So South Africa was panicking to say, no, this guy has changed – now the ANC will move into Lesotho. Now it was, you know, a threat to the government of South Africa, so they actually now moved back to the BCP (Basotho Congress Party) because they were aware that the BCP was having some problems in guerrilla training outside there. So at that time the PAC and the BCP were together. Then the BCP could now move freely to Lesotho to destroy the BNP government. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

The BCP underwent a similar change in this period also - although in the opposite direction. With the tacit support of the South Africans, the BCP's Lesotho Liberation

Army operated from bases in Qwa Qwa – allowing the 'free movement' into Lesotho described above.

The BNP's conversion did not extend to holding democratic elections, however, and shortly after a form of quasi-election was held in 1985, in which only BNP candidates stood, South Africa backed a military coup by a faction in the army lead by Major General Lekhanya. This was recent history at the time of the 1987 strike, and Lesotho remained under military rule until the BCP won a landslide victory in 1993. (Gay and Hall 2000: 8)

The Basotho miners who were part of NUM had not, therefore, necessarily learnt all their politics in NUM. A significant proportion of key NUM leaders from Lesotho were in fact effectively political refugees from Lesotho, who had fought and won a democratic election in Lesotho in the 1970's on a platform of democratic values and an explicit rejection of traditional leadership, and had fled a South African-initiated military coup. They brought with them political experience and a political agenda that was not just aligned with NUM's goals, but also had a key influence on the character of NUM and on the direction it took. While NUM President James Motlatsi is the most high profile example of this, Puseletso Salae's story encompasses these struggles in Lesotho, the formation of NUM – and the history of MDA in Lesotho also.

Puseletso Salae was an organizer for NUM from its earliest days, as a union 'in formation' within the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), and before its formal launch. Allen describes Ramaphosa's first days as an organiser in CUSA – and in the process, introduces Salae also:

> Piroshaw Camay gave Ramaphosa his new organising assignment on a Saturday morning and he immediately went to have his first glimpse of a mine shaft and a mine hostel in the Johannesburg area.....When he began the practical work of organising he was given one assistant, Puseletso Salae, a dismissed mineworker from Lesotho who was an active member of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). (Allen 2003: 88)

Salae had been working for TEBA (The Employment Bureau of Africa), the labour recruiting agency of the Chamber of Mines, as a fingerprint expert:

> After a period of training and work in Johannesburg, he was transferred to Vaal Reefs No. 6 shaft, which was his base for five years or so. He moved constantly from shaft to shaft on Vaal Reefs checking and classifying fingerprints. A warm and friendly individual, he built up an

> extensive network of acquaintances on all the shafts and compounds of the vast Vaal Reefs complex. (Moodie 1994: 250)

Salae was transferred to Johnnesburg, where he was expected to train the white staff who would become his supervisors. He joined CUSA, and started trying to organize workers in TEBA. He was dismissed – and returned to Vaal Reefs to organize for NUM. He is credited with 'virtually single-handedly' organizing the entire Vaal Reefs complex with its ten shafts (Moodie 1994: 252). Vaal Reefs Mine was located in Klerksdorp in what was then the Western Transvaal. It was South Africa's largest mine at the time, with some 40,000 employees, and signing up a significant majority of this workforce was a crucial milestone in NUM's growth. During this period, Salae was twice deported to Lesotho. This is what happened the first time:

> You remember, during apartheid, you are not supposed to have lunch in these Wimpy Bars. So I organised some few comrades, mineworkers, and I said, 'Guys, all of you: put on your white shirts, ties and your jackets and make sure that you are as clean as anything; comb your hair and do everything, and let's go to Klerksdorp, to a restaurant, to a Wimpy Bar.'
>
> We got there, and many of the whites were so shocked; some of them even moved out of the restaurant immediately. We had all brought newspapers, you know, so we can sit in the restaurant reading newspapers. We said to the comrades, 'Even if you can't read, have that newspaper there as if you know how to.'
>
> And we had a lot of money, you know, cash in our hands at that time, so that now we can pay and buy food like everybody. So we occupied the benches and many of the whites were so angry they moved out. The owner was prepared to offer us a service, but the wife of the owner was not happy, so they started clashing. 'No, tell these guys to move or I have to call the police and blah blah'. So the gentleman said, 'But no they are here to eat, why don't you just serve them and then they will go, instead of pushing them out?' So they clashed and then the lady, the wife took all the cutleries and everything, and moved them away from our table and throwed them out, you know, and immediately the police were also called and I was arrested and I was deported for the first time.
>
> I was deported to Lesotho; they didn't even hand me over to the police, they just dropped me in Lesotho and they came back. So I had to find my way back again to South Africa. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

The second time Salae was deported was during the preparations for a strike to celebrate May Day in 1986, and only two days after he had been released from one of many stints in detention. He was taken to the Klerksdorp police station, where he was told 'we know all about you.' Since his first deportation, Salae had returned on a Bophutatswana passport. Salae tells the story:

> 'We know all about you', they said. 'You are originally from Lesotho, from Leribe, so today is the end of Part One, my brother, and you will never see Part Two. Bring your passport.' They took my passport, they cancelled it and cancelled it, they put a stamp on it...
>
> They said, 'You have to go back to your country. You are messing us up here; there is peace here in the Western Transvaal, now you are bringing this Soweto toyi toyi and riots in here and you guys from Lesotho must go and organise these things in your country...'
>
> Then they handed me over to the Lesotho police, with a long list that I have been making bombs, I am a terrorist, and blah, blah. So the Lesotho guys said, 'No! Then how can you hand over this terrorist guy to us openly here, we should get some back-up support, we need South African and Lesotho soldiers as well so that we are sure that we are also secure, only then can we take this man....'
>
> Then in Lesotho, honestly the police didn't say anything, they just searched me and then said, 'But we don't see anything wrong with you... you are a human being like other people.' (Interview with Salae: 2003)

Salae was free to go, and began working for the Migrant Labour Project of the Christian Council of Lesotho, acting as a link between NUM and mineworkers in Lesotho until he was drawn in to the Basotho Mineworkers Labour Co-op after the strike. This may partly explain why the Lesotho Council of Churches was so quick to issue pamphlets supporting the 1987 strike, calling on workers not to become scab labour. Salae was in charge of reception committees set up by the church to meet and provide soup and support to dismissed workers as they arrived at the Maseru border post.

From the time of his second deportation, there was a photograph of Salae on display at the South African border post with Maseru, identifying him as a 'wanted terrorist' – instead it provided at least one familiar face to say a silent 'khutsong' to Basotho mineworkers each time they crossed the South African border. Salae became Secretary of the BMLC, and was later appointed as the Lesotho Co-ordinator for MDA, which he still is.

4.1.2 Struggles over co-op formation in Lesotho

Mapota Molefi, later General Secretary of the Basotho Mineworkers Labour Co-operative, and then manager of the Lesotho Centre, describes the difficulties in meeting workers to report-back on the outcomes of re-instatement negotiations:

> Remember during that time Lesotho was under the leadership of a strong man, that is Mr Lekhanya. So you know, the soldiers wouldn't allow you to

> have *pitso* just to go to the chief and say, I want to meet the people. In fact the chiefs were instructed not to allow any union member to have any gathering. ... So, some of the workers, more especially those who are living in the rural areas, they didn't hear that message, or when they heard about it, it was late, the mine had already closed all the doors. (Interview with Molefi: 2003)

NUM sent a delegation to initiate co-ops in Lesotho, made up of three former NEC and regional committee members. They set up base at the Lakeside Hotel, with hired cars; but dissatisfaction with their performance came to a head when they bought a piece of land for NUM projects just outside Maseru at a vastly inflated price.

Before matters came to a head with NUM, however, they checked out of the hotel, changed their hired car contracts, and moved *en masse* to new offices, to set up a group called Miners and Dependants Welfare Association (MADWA) that was funded by USAID, and was set up as an alternative to NUM's initiatives. NUM's knowledge of this arose because Salae attend a barbecue at the American Embassy, in his capacity as a member of staff – at that time – of the Lesotho Transformation Centre. He was mistaken for one of the Lakeside group by a US Embassy official, who engaged him in discussion about these plans. NUM was initially sceptical at Salae's report-back, which seemed bizarre even in that era of cold war paranoia, but a rival organisation was indeed funded by USAID. (Interview with Salae: 2003).

Luckily, the Lakeside group had performed their mandated tasks sufficiently badly for workers to be unimpressed by their sudden change of gear; but this certainly raised the stakes for NUM in Lesotho, and the pressure on the co-op strategy.

Unlike the Transkei, Lesotho had a Co-operative Law, a Co-operative Ministry, a Co-operative Commissioner, and a level of application of the rule of law that made formal registration of NUM's co-ops necessary. These institutions were modelled on the approach to co-ops that had been taken in many African countries post colonialism, which saw them as a kind of cold war compromise: a way of doffing the cap towards socialism, and towards a kind of surrogate social ownership, under the auspices of one ring-fenced department of government, which was also often the only locus of continued rhetoric about socialism, disconnected from the rest of government policy.

So co-ops were 'owned' by their members, but the terms of this ownership were circumscribed by the powers of the Co-op Commissioner. Ownership of co-op assets vested partly in the Ministry of Co-ops: if a co-op collapsed, its assets were taken over by the Ministry, and the Ministry had a range of powers to intervene in the internal decision-making of co-ops also – in the name of protecting the members.

Workers in Lesotho registered the Basotho Mineworkers Labour Co-operative (BMLC) under Lesotho law. While NUM was not a legal entity in Lesotho, and its activities in Lesotho came under intense scrutiny, the BMLC now provided a legal vehicle through which the ex-miners were able to operate.

The first Chair to be elected was Moses Mokhehle. Although a NUM member, he had not been prominent in NUM, but he claimed to be the son of Dr Ntsu Mokhehle, the head of the exiled BCP. Despite their BCP membership, many NUM stalwarts had found their loyalty to the BCP tested by the shifts that had taken place in the political landscape. This politics found its way into the centre of the NUM co-op programme:

> That is exactly where the whole thing started because (Moses Mokhehle) happened to be claiming to be the son of Ntsu Mokhehle and yet he was not. Threatening 'Comrades, comrades if you don't do this, I will have to bring the LLA.' The LLA is the Lesotho Liberation Army that was in exile, that was formed by the BCP. So that caused problems again, because the very same people, Jack and including myself– we were still members of the BCP but we were actually disillusioned, we didn't even want to get back to the party any more because of internal politics and the relationship with South Africa and so forth.... So we were no more interested and this caused again a conflict between us. And the guy kept on saying, 'I'll have to inform my father, if you don't do this', and other threats, anyway. But unfortunately that took a very serious direction. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

Mapota Molefi shared little of Salae's politics. The two exist in opposite magnetic fields, so when they share a common interpretation of events, it has always carried particular weight in MDA. Molefi also describes Mokhehle as 'a stumbling block'. By this time, both the NUM Projects Department and the BMLC committee were unhappy with a serious lack of accountability over financial issues; and finally there was an attempt to remove Mokhehle.

> He could not perform, so he was behaving exactly like the Lakeside group - chowing money, no accountability, if we give him money to go to give to the project at Quthing, he would go there and not even go to the project, and come back after five days with no receipts, and nothing had been

> done. So we wanted to change this, but you remember we were a registered co-operative, we could not just change him, we had to call the Commissioner of Co-operatives in Lesotho. But because of the weakness and lack of backbone of civil servants in the government, they thought this guy was telling the truth that he was the son of Mokhehle so they said no, you can't change anything. (Interview with Molefi: 2003)

Salae describes how they then went to the family home of Dr Ntsu Mokhehle, and found that Moses Mokhehle was not, in fact, recognized by Mokhehle as his son. Yet the Commissioner continued to refuse to allow the BMLC to call a special AGM. With formal channels to remove him through proper procedures closed to them by the Commissioner, fair means turned to foul.

Mokhehle was known to greatly enjoy exercising his signing powers as President, without always paying much attention to the contents of the documents put before him. He was taken a pile of cheques and papers to sign, amongst which was a document supposedly verifying that he was no longer the President of the BMLC, and a resolution from the BMLC executive to this effect. He signed them. On the basis of these documents, the BMLC removed him as a signatory at the bank, and – confronted with the 'evidence' – the Commissioner of Co-ops finally agreed to allow the BMLC to proceed with a special AGM.

But Mokhehle had been tricked; and he in turn turned to dirtier tactics. The BMLC offices, located in a building at the main circle in Maseru, near the cathedral, were attacked by Mokhehle and a group of ex-miners armed with knives and sticks. The committee was routed, some were injured, and the offices were ransacked. It was the first of many such attacks in the following weeks.

When the AGM finally took place, it was under the protection of the Lesotho police and army, with soldiers cordoning off the venue, because of concern that it would come under violent attack. In elections presided over by the Co-op Commissioner, a new leadership was elected. Mokhehle was removed: for the time being, anyway.

The establishment of the BMLC, with its links to NUM and the ANC, also attracted the interest and support of progressive intellectuals in Lesotho. Salae explains how this strengthened the Lesotho programme:

> We got support from the intellectuals in Lesotho, progressive forces, but intellectual guys who were very much behind the ANC who actually see these co-operatives as a backup, a tool that they would also use to support the structures of the progressive organisations in Lesotho ... So intellectual support was there - which was not actually happening, if you get to Eastern Cape, if you get to Swaziland, that was not happening, guys were on their own.
>
> So that is the right thing, because on our own we are fighting from 8 o'clock until 4 o'clock, nothing is done in the office, fighting fighting fighting. But in the presence of an external person from the university, who says guys, let's sit down, today what is happening. Now we need to meet EU, right, make an appointment; and write what we are going to do, to present to EU...On Saturday in the morning, they are not working, they call us, guys let's meet in the office on Saturday. So, that thing, it changed even myself, you know; I got changed a little bit, gradually up to now, I have to do things in a different way.... I remember two guys that were from the university, those were the guys who could analyse even the cash flows and help us to understand.
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> And the strategy was that he should not say that he is going to teach us, because once he can say 'guys I am here to teach you' people will say, no, I want to go home, because he is an intellectual guy, you know, remember that. Sort of an inferiority complex would come in immediately to say, no, these ones are from the university and I don't want to talk to him. So people just come there and sit without pen and paper and talk talk until we feel that you have to give him a paper and say: Why don't you write what you are saying down? Then he says okay, bring the paper so I can write it down. That is how culturally you know they did a lot, honestly. Then the fear again from other forces, from the government, let's say, because they could see that the BMLC was very close to the university. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

They had good reason for concern. Salae tells the story of how together with this network of university-based intellectuals and professionals, they were able to stop Mandela from visiting Lesotho in 1990: because they did not want him to confer legitimacy on the military regime.

> Mandela was supposed to visit Lesotho and we immediately assembled at BMLC offices, to prepare, and we immediately faxed to ANC, faxed to NUM, and I happened to be here (Johannesburg) the following day and I took that issue to the working committee of the ANC, it was Cyril Ramaphosa and others at the time. So they said, okay stay outside, we want to discuss this and that and find out exactly what is happening and they took about an hour. At 5.30 they said, 'No, no, Mandela is no more going to Lesotho', and we were so happy that you know, we have stopped Mandela. A small team has managed to do that, then I rushed back driving that red bakkie to Lesotho drrrrrrrr... the border gates were closing at 10 o'clock at that time. I drove very fast to make sure that I report back to say 'Guys, you have succeeded, Mandela is no more coming.' Imagine, in that time when Lesotho was busy talking about Mandela coming to Lesotho, they had bought many blankets, you know, slaughtered so many cattle, sheep and what. At about 10 o'clock at the latest news, they said, Mandela is no more coming, and we were so

> happy. So then that thing makes us to be close to these intellectuals, politics and business. (Interview with Salae: 2003)

This role and influence of the ex-miners at the highest levels of South African politics did not, of course, go unnoticed within Lesotho politics.

> And again that thing on its own again, makes the government now to distance itself from the BMLC, saying now these organisations, ei, are politics not co-operatives. I remember we were told by the (Co-op) Commissioner, he called us and said are you guys running a co-operative or a trade union? Then we said, no, no, we are running a co-operative. He said: 'No, Salae you are lying, look at all these photos' - he was confronting the old man Ntate Jack, at the co-op, and he said, 'What are these: Mandela, Mandela, Ramaphosa, ANC what what. This is Lesotho, but you don't have a picture of the Prime Minister of Lesotho here?'
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> And then Ntate Jack answered in a very clever way, he said, 'No, no, no, all these are friends, if you want to be a friend of the BMLC, you can be a friend as well, we won't say no. This Mandela is a friend of us, you know.' Even the Minister of Co-operatives, who was the secretary of the BCP - he told James Motlatsi when he was in Lesotho, 'Guys I am watching these co-operatives, these are not co-operatives.' (Interview with Salae: 2003)

Ferguson would no doubt enjoy the irony. 'Depoliticised development' meant development was not politics, and so, in an environment in which political activity was not allowed, 'development' was nevertheless legitimate terrain for the ex-miners to occupy – and as long as what they were doing could be justified as development, it could not be condemned as politics - despite the explicitly political dimension of the BMLC's role.

In Lesotho, a politics of development and development as an integral part of a wider political agenda remained integral to the way NUM and MDA's programme unfolded– despite the fact that even in development from below, depoliticisation is a risk. It is against this backdrop – and within the ever-present ambit of this wider politics – that the process of co-op development finally began in earnest.