

University of the Witwatersrand

The Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Shop floor challenges, opportunities and strategies of shop steward in Post-apartheid South Africa:

**A case study of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
(NUMSA)**

Nunurayi Mutyanda

Student Number: 562145

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Industrial Sociology-Labour Policy and Globalisation.

Johannesburg, 2012

Abstract

There is general consensus that the reorganisation of production and labour processes and shift in union ideological focus and growth of bureaucratic structures have resulted in the diminishing of a collective voice at most workplaces. This study explores the challenges facing shop stewards at the shop floor in their day to day activities in the aftermath of these changes and examines ways through which they get around them. The day to day activities of shop stewards is not a new phenomenon. However shop stewards have not been targeted as subject for study since democratisation. Where they were mentioned, it was mostly due to their involvement at the shop floor where they are required to carry the workers grievances to the management as well as explaining union standpoint to constituent. The study affirms arguments by previous researchers that shop stewards play a contradictory role, trying to satisfy the aspirations of the constituents who elected the stewards as well as management, the stewards' pay master who expect the steward to be a social partner, though the relationship is highly unequal. The study noted that though they are social partners, management is insincere when it comes to work environment where it's not meeting the minimum safety requirements. Moreover, union bureaucratic structures though they are meant to increase efficiency have wiped shop floor democracy since decisions are mostly handed down from the top, confirming the argument that as organisations grows bigger, they tend towards oligarchy. In-depth interviews were conducted at one plant in Wadeville and another on in Nigel local of NUMSA's Ekurhuleni region. The interviews were complemented with documentary analysis as well as observation during shop steward council meetings.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Industrial Sociology-Labour Policies and Globalisation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

_____ day of

_____ 2011 Nunurayi Mutyanda

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my two daughters; Kundai and Kudzai; my spouse, Violet and my mother Nakai.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to individuals and institutions that assisted in various ways; enabling me to complete this research project.

This research would not have been possible without the invaluable supervision and mentorship by Dr Sarah Mosoetsa. I greatly appreciate her support and encouragement throughout the research process.

I am grateful to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the other Global Labour University partners who funded my study programme, of which without their support, it might have been a pipe dream to obtain this masters degree.

I also thank all my colleagues at Gombakomba Secondary School, Zimbabwe, and comrades at my union, Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe for all the support and belief in me. I specially mention the following comrades: Tecla Chido Mungwashu, Emma Mukaratirwa, Peter Simango, Piwai Chendume, Renias Mujaji, Patrick Kumbukani, Mr Mvundura and Pedzisai Chitenderu. The list cannot be complete without mentioning the former Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) counsellor for Manicaland Mr Crispin Chinguno and the Executive Committee member Mr Taurai Mereki for giving me fliers that introduced me to the programme.

This research would not have been possible without support from the National Union of Metalworkers South Africa (NUMSA). Special mention goes to NUMSA Regional Organiser Mr Meschack Robertson, Godden Hadebe, Siyabonga Mbuqe and Tengo Tegeta. To them and the shop stewards in the Metals and Engineering sector, I urge them not to despair but keep knocking.

I also want to thank my programme mate, Vivian Chuchu for constantly reminding me to work hard and always asked me to imagine how I would explain to my 4 year old daughter that her trusted 'Daddy' failed school.

Lastly I extend my profound gratitude to my wife Violet, our children, Kundai and Kudzai and my nucleus family for the moral and spiritual support and for enduring a year without their father.

CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Contents	vi
List of Tables	ix
Acronyms and Abbreviations	x
INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background	2
1.3 Objectives and Rationale	4
1.4 Structure of the research report	7
Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW	
1.1 Introduction	10
1.2 The origins of unionism in South Africa	10
1.3 Trade Unions in Post-apartheid South Africa	12
1.4 Overview of Shop Steward Movement	14
1.5 Opportunities for Trade Unions after Democratisation in 1994	18
1.6 The Challenges facing Trade Unions after Democratisation.	20
1.7 NUMSA as a case study.	26
1.8 Theoretical Framework	26
1.9 The Structure and Agency Debate Continues	29
1.10 The Theory of Oligarchy	32
1.10.1 Weber' notion of Bureaucracy	33
1.11 Conclusion	34
Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY	
2.1 Introduction	35
2.2 The case study research method	35
2.3 Selection of research site	35
2.4 The value of Qualitative Research Methods	37
2.4.1 In-depth and key informant interviews	38
2.4.2 Observation	39
2.4.3 Documentary analysis	41
2.5 Data interpretation and analysis	42
2.6 Sampling	42
2.7 Pilot testing	43
2.8 The Researcher and the respondents	45
2.9 Access and Ethical issues	45
2.10 Limitations of the Study	45
2.11 Conclusion	46

Chapter 3: PROFILE OF SHOP STEWARDS: No Material benefits but significant influence at the shop floor.

3.1 Introduction	47
3.1.1 Age of shop stewards	47
3.1.2 Period of Service	48
3.1.3 The Level of Education	49
3.1.4 Hindrance to full Participation of Women in Union Activities	50
3.2 Do Shop Stewards have any Benefits?	56
3.3 Reasons for becoming Shop Stewards	57
3.4 Conclusion	61

Chapter 4: THE SHOP STEWARD IN THE NUMSA ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Introduction	62
4.1.1 Shop Stewards at the Workplace Level	63
4.1.2 Shop stewards at the Local Structure	65
4.1.2.1 The Local Shop Stewards Council: Are shop stewards failing to follow protocol?	65
4.1.3 The Regional Structure: Do shop stewards still have significant influence?	66
4.1.3.1 The Regional Congress	66
4.1.3.2 The Regional Executive Committee (REC)	67
4.1.3.3 The Regional Finance Committee	67
4.1.4 The National Structure: Are shop stewards being coerced or co-opted?	68
4.1.4.1 The National Congress	68
4.1.4.2 The Central Committee	70
4.1.4.3 The National Executive Committee (NEC)	71
4.1.4.4 The National Finance Committee	71
4.2 Challenges that emanate from the NUMSA's hierarchical structure.	79
4.3 Conclusion	79

Chapter 5: MAN AND WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE: Serving too many masters

5.1 Introduction	80
5.2 The shop steward's work area.	80
5.3 The shop steward in the eyes of the Rank and File and Management.	81
5.3.1 The Shop Steward versus the Rank and File.	81
5.3.2 The Shop Steward in the eyes of Management	84
5.4 Management Tactics to silence the Union	90
5.5 The role of Shop Stewards in the implementation of National Policies	96
5.6 The Shop Steward as a Social Worker	99
5.7 Conclusion	100

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction	102
-------------------------	------------

6.2 Recommendations	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	105
APPENDIX	
In depth Interview Schedule for shop stewards	110
Informed Consent Form for interviews	113
Consent form for tape recording	114
Application to Conduct a Research with your Firm	115
Access Letter	116
Shop Steward Nomination forms	117

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: NUMSA Ekurhuleni membership	26
Table 2: List of Respondents	39
Table 3: Age of Shop Stewards	47
Case 1: Work history of Evans	48
Case 2: Work history of Sibongile	49

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC-	Africa National Congress
AZACTU-	Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions
BEE-	Black Economic Empowerment
BCEA-	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CEO-	Chief Executive Officers
CBA-	Collective bargaining agreements
CCMA-	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
CONSAWU-	Confederation of South African Worker's Union
COSATU-	Congress of South Africa Trade Union
CUSA-	Council of Unions of South Africa
DITSELA-	Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour
FORCE-	Federation of Organisations Representing Civil Employees
FOSATU-	Federation of South Africa Trade Unions
FEDSAL-	Federation of South African Labour Union
FEDUSA-	Federation of Trade Unions South Africa
GAWU-	General and Allied Workers Union
GEAR-	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
ICU-	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ICEMF-	International Chemical, Energy and Mining Federation
ICFTU-	International Confederation of Free Trade union,
IMWF-	International Metalworkers Federation
IR-	Industrial Relations

LRA-	Labour Relations Act
MD-	Managing Director
MAWU-	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MICWU-	Motor Industry Combined Workers Union
NAAWU-	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NACTU-	National Council of Trade Unions
NEDLAC-	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEC -	National Executive Committee
NEF-	National Economic Forum
NALEDI-	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NUMSA-	National Union of Metalworkers South Africa
NMC-	National Manpower Commission
NEHAWU-	Health and Allied Workers Union
OHS-	Occupational Health and Safety
REC-	Regional Executive Committee
RDP-	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP-	South African Communist Party
SATUCC-	Southern African Coordinating Council
TUCSA-	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TGWU-	Transport and General Workers Union
UDF-	United Democratic Front
UMMAWOSA-	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa
UCW-	Union Carriage and Wagon